



Ed. L. Benson

Books by Katharine Brush

GLITTER

LITTLE SINS

NIGHT CLUB

YOUNG MAN OF MANHATTAN

YOUNG MAN OF MANHATTAN

By
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FOR
TOMMY BRUSH

YOUNG MAN OF MANHATTAN

CHAPTER ONE

YOU have seen him, perhaps, where the bands are playing and the pennants flying and the people cheering. He is always there; diligent there. At a football game, while you leap up to howl and wave your arms, he sits quite still in the press box high behind you, squinting through smoke, saying quietly out of the side of his mouth to his telegrapher, "Adams made five yards off tackle. First down. Yale's ball." When you snake-dance off to the campus when the game is finally ended, he removes the cover from his portable typewriter, twists long telegraph paper in, writes, "By So-and-So—New Haven, Conn., November 24."——and then *writes*. When you go home from the boxing match, or the hockey game, or the boat race, you leave him there, in the dawn of his business day. But because he works while you play, pity him not; he plays while you work—and you work longer and harder, in dustier places.

Perhaps you think of a sports writer as an old man who knew Cap Anson and remembers when prize fights were won in the sixty-third round. You are mistaken. He is usually young. Twenty-five. Thirty-two. Usually, though not always, he has a pretty young wife who has been taught not to sit up for him; sometimes he has a baby who chews pencils. He is, as a type, rather well dressed; clean-shaven; ex-collegiate in appearance. He carries speakeasy cards, autographed, in all of his pockets.

He falls in love with ease, smokes endless cigarettes to

their stubs, and never, even on payday, has any money. He rides in taxis. He talks a picturesque lingo, with much original slang, and is always going to try his hand at fiction day after tomorrow. Or the day after that. Or next week, when the six-day bicycle race at the Garden is over. Or next month, after the Series is off his mind. . . .

He is, in short, Toby McLean, of the New York Star.

This is Toby's own story. It is also the story of little Ann Vaughn, who did the movies for the Chronicle-Press. It begins properly on the night they met; the night Tunney first beat Dempsey.

There was rain that night, if you will recall, beating in torrents on all Philadelphia, drenching the streets and the motor cars and the Sesqui Stadium, half drowning the people. It was the sort of fight night nobody enjoys save those who were unable to be present. They tell you afterwards, smugly, "Well, we thought of you! There we were, all warm and cosy, hearing it *perfectly* on the radio——"

A horrible night. And not the least of its horrors was the aftermath of the fight, when by every hook or crook imaginable to man, you tried to get conveyance back to town—and simply couldn't.

"Hell," said Toby McLean, after twenty minutes of this. "I may as well wade."

He set out. The street was full of soggy people setting out, all going one way; of cars with loaded running boards; of peril. Mindful of an injunction seen sometimes on country roads, Toby walked on the side of approaching traffic. There was no sidewalk. Tires through puddles splashed his legs, and near horns shattered his eardrums. He walked with his hands in his pockets, coat-collar up and hat-brim down. His face was a triangle

of sunburn, glistening wet, with annoyed blue eyes. When he lifted it to headlights, the people in that car perceived that he was young, and very handsome.

Perhaps four hundred yards from the Stadium, he overtook a trudging figure, round and hunched, with neck foreshortened, like a turtle on hind legs. This, when he came abreast of it, proved to be Blake of the Gothamite.

"Is that you, Toby?" Blake said feebly.

"In a diluted form, yes."

They walked on together.

"File your story already?"

Toby nodded. "Dictated the blow-by-blow. Bill's doing the lead—thank God. I left him soaking wet and sore as hell."

"Where's he working?"

"In the Sesqui tool-shed."

"Yeah," said Blake. "I saw that shed. Fifty of 'em in there, and one lantern. What a life!"

"Yeah," Toby said. "You weekly boys 're lucky . . . What'd you think of the fight?"

They discussed the fight for some moments. They would discuss it, in print and privately, for weeks to come. The present exchange of "Well, I tell you's" was interrupted long before fever heat by a sudden extraneous exclamation of Blake's. "Say!" he cried. "There's—Wait a second."

He hastened forward, and seized by the elbow a girl in a red hat who was moving along alone in front of them. He and the girl stopped, and in four steps Toby caught up. "Isn't this *terrible*, Joe?" the girl was saying. Quite merrily.

She was a rather little girl, and very moist indeed, as if she had been pulled out of a river. The red hat, which must have been scarlet normally, was crimson to its tiny

curled brim. The fur cuffs and collar of the slim tailored coat appeared rinsed. Below the cuffs, the girl's hands were bare, and very white. One of them clutched wet weedy gloves and a purse. From the unresisting other, Joe Blake was removing a diminutive boxed typewriter.

"Where's what's-his-name?" he demanded. "Bentham. Wasn't he with you?"

"We got separated in the shuffle."

"You shouldn't be alone——"

"Well, I'm not any longer."

"You know Toby McLean, don't you," Blake said.

"No—I don't——"

Her lashes, starry with rain, came up. Her eyes were dark, or they seemed so; in the unreal, fitful light, one could not be sure. They were beautiful eyes, wide and luminous, and they did a new thing to Toby. A queer quick thing, like a pluck at taut strings in his nerves.

"I've heard of him, though," said the girl. "A lot. Hello, Toby McLean."

"How are you?"

"I could die. How are you?"

"This is little Ann Vaughn," Blake announced in an exhibitor's voice. "If you read the Chronicle-Press——"

"He doesn't," Ann said. "I can tell." She smiled at Toby, casually. Her mouth was very red in a dewy white face. It fascinated him. "Indelible lipstick?" he wondered. Somewhere he had seen an advertisement. . . .

"But I do," he demurred automatically.

Ann did not heed. "*Look* at me!" she was saying, looking down at herself. She extended one foot, wriggled its sad small high-heeled shoe in a headlight's beam, and laughed. "*Pl-e-ease!*"

Her beholders showed immediate concern. "Say!"

exclaimed Blake. "This can't be! We'll have to get you into one of these cars——"

As a gesture toward that end, he yelled, "Hey!" at the car that happened to be going by at the moment. There were nine in the car and three on the running-board. It did not stop.

"Laps have been offered," Ann observed. "But I declined them. I only ride in strange men's laps on third Mondays in May. I'm funny like that."

She smiled again at Toby. Sideways this time, for they had begun simultaneously to move along.

Toby smiled back. "Cute," he thought.

It was at once apparent that three could not walk abreast on the rim of road that was left to them by the passing mudguards. Toby caught Ann's arm and held it close. The ruse was successful. After a moment of nimble dodging, Blake gave up and fell in at the rear—whence he was to be heard shouting, "Hey!" plaintively, at intervals.

"I know *you*," Toby said.

"Really, do you?"

"Umm. You do a movie column. Am I right," he queried, peering down at her, "or am I right?"

"You're both," said Ann.

Her profile in the alternating gloom and glow was loveliness first promised, then fulfilled. A straight short little nose. A model chin, pointed yet soft. Dark lashes that were probably the longest in the world, curling just the way her hat-brim curled. Toby's gaze stayed riveted while six or eight cars swished by.

Presently he said, "What color's your hair?"

"It's brown."

Question and answer were as matter-of-fact as if Toby

had asked the time. There was nothing coquettish about this newspaper girl.

"I couldn't make out," said Toby.

"It's cut awfully short, that's why."

They continued the conversation. "What's a movie columnist doing on the fight?" Toby wanted to know. "Dempsey's wife wasn't there, was she?"

Ann shook her head. "Several picture people were, though. I'm doing a sort of crowd story—if I ever get where I can. How much farther *is* it into town, do you know?"

"I'll find out," Toby said.

"No, don't. Let's just keep thinking it isn't far."

Toby looked down at the ground again, at the small bedraggled shoes that marched straight on, through water and pebbles and mud. "Poor kid," he said. "You're miserable, aren't you?"

"I would like a hot bath," Ann admitted.

"And an open fire."

"And a steak!"

"And a highball *this high!*" finished Toby.

For the first time since he took her arm, Ann glanced directly up at him. Her eyes were thoughtful. "Yes," she said. "That's one of the things I heard."

"Heard?"

"About you."

"What?" Toby demanded defensively. "That I like a little highball now and then?"

Ann smiled, shifting her eyes. "Well, no," she said. "Not exactly." After an instant she added, "It doesn't matter, anyway."

But it did matter. It mattered tremendously, all of a sudden. "Tell me," Toby urged, pressing Ann's arm

and leaning down to her, "just what they said. Please tell me."

"I've forgotten."

"Said I drank too much? Was that it?" His voice was belligerent.

"We're not going to fight, are we?" Ann said. "I'm sorry I mentioned it."

"But what'd they *say*?"

"Oh—something about its being too bad——"

"Listen!" Toby shouted.

He halted in his tracks, and Ann perforce halted also. She looked faintly surprised. Toby looked grim. That this small cool girl with the long-lashed eyes should think well of him was terrifically important; it was temporarily the most important thing in life. He sought the right words; but before he could find them, Blake was at hand.

"How now?" said Blake.

He had mud on his cheek, and glanced brightly from one to the other.

Toby glared at him. "Nothing," he said. "Not a thing. You keep on watching the cars." Even to his preoccupied ears this sounded rude, so he added, "Ann's *got* to get to town. She's got a deadline."

He faced her around, and they proceeded as before, Blake, with the typewriter, behind them.

"The point is," Toby said in a somewhat mollified tone, "you have me all wrong. I don't drink any more than anyone else. Honestly I don't."

"It doesn't matter," Ann said again.

There was a pause. Then Toby cried abruptly, vehemently, "I *want* it to matter! I want it to matter to *you*——"

"You're crazy!" said Ann.

But her laugh was a little uncertain.

They had come a long way in fifteen minutes in the rain.

§

Joe Blake finally corralled a car as it crept from a parking field, with two young men in the front and an empty tonneau. He and Ann and Toby rode gaily into town. Toby, who had been sending articles with Philadelphia date-lines for three days past, had a hotel room, and it was agreed that Ann should use this now for the writing of her story and the drying of her clothes. They parted in the lobby.

"How long will you be?" Toby asked.

"Not very long." She frowned up at the clock. "I'd better not be!"

"Can I do some of it for you?"

"No, thanks. I'll be all right."

Toby thought, "She's probably the dampest girl in Philly at this moment—still she's the prettiest."

He said, "About an hour, then?"

"Less than that, I hope."

"I'll ring the room in forty-five minutes. Then we'll have some supper."

"Yeah. Supper," said Blake.

Nobody was to forget him.

They watched Ann cross to the elevators and vanish into one of them. Her shoes left tiny muddy marks, toe and heel, like fat exclamation points on the parquet. Toby eyed these when she was gone.

"Well——" said Blake.

"Well?"

"Let's go up to Jim Andrews' room, see if he's there."

"Who's Jim Andrews?"

"Syndicate fellow. Come on," said Blake, "he's got good rye."

To avoid unnecessary exertion, they inquired at the desk for Andrews' key. It was there, so they took it, and went up. The room was empty and in great confusion. Cigarette butts were crushed into the carpet. The bedspread was a map of wrinkles and hollows. On the desk was a cleared rectangle where a typewriter must have stood, and the floor below the desk was littered with sheets of yellow paper upon each of which one line was typewritten. Blake picked up a page. It read: "Philadelphia, Sept. 23—By James S. Andrews—Philadelphia is agog today."

All the other pages read the same.

"He had a tough time," Blake said sympathetically.

Toby was shedding his overcoat, coat and vest; draping them on a chair by the radiator. From a pocket he removed a battered silver flask, which he shook. "Here's some. Enough to last till he comes."

"If he isn't too long."

They drank large potations from bathroom tumblers, with a little water.

"Maybe," Blake suggested, "we ought to send some 'round to the beautiful darling."

Toby looked up quickly. "She doesn't drink, does she?"

"Sure, some. She's a good egg. Why," said Blake, "what made you think she didn't?"

"I don't know. I just did."

Blake crossed to the telephone. "We'll order White Rock and ice. . . . Room Service, please. That's right, baby."

"Women," said Toby, "like ginger ale with Scotch."

"But this is a woman of intelligence."

The White Rock and ice were slow in coming. Toby and Blake set liquor aside, in a special glass, for Ann's highball; and split what remained. They talked little. Toby was thinking, "I must get rid of this guy."

He inquired, "Have you known her a long time?"

"Yeah," said Blake. "Three or four years. We used to work together on a paper up in Portland, Maine, where she comes from. She's a damn sweet kid," he added. "I like her. Everybody likes her."

"How long's she been in New York?"

"Two years. She came down to work for the old Press, as a reporter. Then when the Chronicle combined, they kept her on, and put her on movies. She does a column, you know. 'They Tell Me', by Ann Vaughn. Interviews, and all that. She's smart," said Blake. "That one's going somewhere. She can write like nobody's business."

"She's pretty," said Toby.

Blake nodded emphatically. "Plenty!" he said. His eyes met Toby's. "And straight as they come, do you see? She's kept out of the muck—'way out—and you know that's hard to do in this racket. I mean, a girl alone——"

"Umm," Toby agreed. "Right."

After a silence he said, "She's all alone? No people or whatnot?"

"Poppa in Portland," answered Blake. "He was all right, but he married again. And Ann and her step-mother hit it off like a couple of bee-stung bulldogs——"

A commotion at the door interrupted him. Five damp and grouchy sports writers tramped in. They were followed closely by a waiter with the White Rock, which Jim Andrews, owner of the room, surveyed with scorn.

"One bottle!" he said bitterly. "What's that for, to put a rose in? For God's sake, Joe!"

"Waiter," he added, "the sample's okay. Bring us up a case, and bring it quick."

Drenched coats were peeled off and thrown into corners. Typewriters were thumped down here and there. Gentlemen swore in a whole-hearted manner and felt much better at once. "You all know Toby McLean?" Blake inquired. They all did but Andrews, who said he was glad to. Shorty Ross of the Gazette, who knew Toby like a brother, having roomed with him on Southern baseball trips for several years, averred that he believed he had not the pleasure, and he and Toby gravely shook hands. "The name, please?" Toby said, cupping his ear.

Andrews took bottles from a suitcase under the bed and began a systematic search for a corkscrew. Toby surreptitiously put on his coat and vest. Talk of the fight, apparently postponed for a moment only, was resumed. There was an uproar of unfinished sentences:

"But listen here—as I said before——"

"Listen, remember in the seventh——"

"Hell, you could tell when he *came out*——"

And so on, and so on.

At the end of a noisy interval, someone suddenly cried, "Hold! Where you going with that?"

Toby, a full drink in his hand, was nine-tenths of the way to the door.

"He's taking it to a lady," Blake said. "Need any help, Toby?"

"What lady?"

"Where?"

"Ann Vaughn," answered Blake. "She's up in ten-something, writing her story."

"Bring her down!"

"I'll try," Toby said. "I'll be back."

He shut the door, firmly.

In the elevator mirror, going from the fourth floor to the tenth, he surveyed his image with unwonted interest. Black slightly curly hair, parted in the middle. Heavy black brows, and sea-blue eyes. Skin the color of health and weather, and a mouth the shape of affability. An engaging image, anybody would have said; but Toby scowled at it. "Irish mug!" The ears stuck out. . . .

She was used to these darn beautiful movie actors. . . .

One of his hands steadied the highball glass in his suit coat pocket. With the palm of the other he smoothed his hair, first on the left side, then on the right; and adjusted his tie. Then he thought sarcastically, "Now *that* helps a lot, doesn't it!"

He got out at the tenth floor disgusted with himself.

The ice in the glass clinked faintly with every move he made; his pace was leisured, so that it should not spill. From afar he caught the busy clatter of Ann's machine, through the open transom, and as he came nearer a curious pride welled in him. "Attababy!" he thought. Smart little girl.

He waited respectfully for the inevitable lull. When it came, after a moment's very special clatter which he recognized as the *x*-ing out of a line, he knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" called Ann.

"Young Mister McLean, the eminent journalist."

There was a tiny vocal sound, then the sound of a chair pushed back. Then quick soft steps. Ann opened the door an inch or two and smiled at him.

"The valet has my dress," she explained. "He's try-

ing to make it look like something. I've got on your bathrobe. Do you mind?"

The top of her head seemed lower down than it had been. "No heels," thought Toby.

"Mind?" he said. "I'm honored."

He wished fleetingly that the bathrobe were newer.

"How's the story coming?"

"All right. I'll be through, in just a minute."

"I brought you a drink," said Toby, "to spur you on."

"Oh, you're wonderful!"

Her small hand, cuffed with a great roll of familiar cotton sleeve, reached out and took the glass. "Thanks ever so much."

"Let me see what you've written," Toby said.

"It's not too hot—"

But she brought it to him. Two pages of typing, double-spaced. "Read copy on it," she directed. "Will you please, Toby? See if I've spelled 'separate' right, I never do. And then will you take this much down to the Western Union and tell them to start it? Because I'm late. And I'll have the rest in a minute."

He read the two pages sitting on a bench by the elevators, his long legs crossed, a pencil in his hand. Twice he made corrections in spelling, smiling gently; at one point he inserted a paragraph mark. Once he laughed aloud delightedly, and once, almost with reverence, he murmured, "Swell—*swell* stuff—"

He felt a little sad when he had finished. It was a little cruel, somehow, that she could write so well. Better than he. Much better. This story, done so fast to catch an imminent edition, was better than the best of his. It was as good as the story he always *meant* to write, when he typed "By Toby McLean" on a blank sheet.

"I could, though," he thought. "I could if I tried. There's a mine of it there."

Invariably he thought this in self-analytical moments. There was a mine untapped in his mind. A deep rich vein of phrase, of skillful style and nice technique. Only he was lazy, and would not dig for it.

"She could make me," he thought now. "Shame me into it—" He stared moodily down at the pages. "Damn it! She's got me *licked*!"

But he was proud, proud

CHAPTER TWO

YOU must know this young man.

People loved him. His blue eyes said to each, "Say, I think *you're* grand!" And he did think so. Though he was subject at times to the exquisite melancholia of his race, usually life elated him. His laughter was frequent, beginning always with an abrupt great shout that did something to you, something warm and heartening—so gay it was. So insouciant. And younger than his youth.

He was twenty-six. He had been born at high noon on a flash-bang Fourth of July, at a summer resort; and everything in his life had been like that. Confusion, color, glamour—these things attended him always. Or perhaps it was that he created them as he went along. There was an excitement about him, subtly contagious. Where he was things happened, things began.

He had no parents. He could not even remember his mother. She was a stranger's photograph under things in his third desk drawer. Once in a great while, coming across this photograph, he held it close and regarded it solemnly. He always felt that he ought to feel something. But he never did.

His father, Tom McLean, had been at one time or another an actor, a soldier, a poet, a theatrical press agent, and the owner of a small-town newspaper. Always he had been spectacular, charming, and slightly mad, as Toby was. His life had been lived at high tension, with the aid of alcohol. People said he would die drunk. They were wrong, as people are. At the age of forty, Tom

McLean died soberer than usual, in the collapse of a wooden bleachers from which he had been watching his son play halfback for the local High School.

Toby was seventeen then. He had no near relatives, and he had no money; his father's newspaper (equipment, circulation and good will) belonged to his father's banker. The War was going on, and America was in it. Toby looked of age and vowed he was. In an aviation uniform that splendidly became him, he went to Mineola, where he wrecked a training plane—and himself got scratched slightly. Then he went to France. On his third day up from Tours, far behind the lines, he fell two thousand feet into a tree, and wrecked another. "Three American planes more," he said afterward, cheerfully grinning, "and I'd have been a German ace!"

He spent seven months in a hospital, following the fall at Tours, and emerged with a silver plate in his neck and a leg that troubled him on rainy days. The Armistice had been signed in the meantime, and after considerable Paris, Toby came home. That is, to New York; always he thought of himself as belonging to New York, though he and his father had lived not so long there as elsewhere. "*My town!*" he said, with a kind of fierce ecstacy, to the sharpening skyline.

He was hailed as a hero, which amused and dismayed him; he protested at first, but later, weary of beaming dowagers who wagged reproving forefingers and called him modest, he let it go . . . One of the dowagers, a wealthy widow named Prentiss whose hair was defiantly orange and whose proud boast it was that she had knitted one thousand one hundred and four mufflers for Our Boys, desired to send young Toby McLean to college. This extraordinary beneficence on the part of a lady whom her creditors knew as a skinflint is mentioned only because

it put the idea of college into Toby's head. A great idea, now he thought of it. After all, he was only nineteen.

He thanked Mrs. Prentiss politely; refused her offer; gave a spectacled, wan young man with a dusty Public Library mind fifty dollars to take—and pass—five college board examinations, under the *nom d'examen* of Toby McLean; and entered, in September, 1919, the most glittering University in the East.

The end, he thought with composure, justified the means.

He had to earn his tuition and living, and this he did in divers ways, none of them arduous, all of them characteristic. It became at once apparent to him that almost anything could be sold to Freshmen, so he posed as a Sophomore, lofty and wise, and did (until apprehended) a rushing business in ancient furniture, textbooks, alarm-clocks, Fords, and actress's photographs. Next he originated and put on the market a series of cards designed to relieve the tired campus man of the burden of correspondence. There were cards to be sent to mothers, to fathers, to sisters, to sweethearts, to friends. The fathers' card read, "Dear Dad; I am well. (I am suffering from——). I am broke. (I received your check for \$——). I am studying hard." Etc., etc. The sender crossed off such statements as were not pertinent, filled in the blanks, and mailed the result to his outraged parent.

The sale was tremendous.

Other sources of income were a dance orchestra—"Toby McLean and His Banjo Boys"; a campus news bureau, which supplied the city papers; and a very dazzling roadster named Giddyup-Whoa, which Toby matter-of-factly won in a fifty-cent raffle, painted a lipstick red, and thereafter rented, cash in advance, to comrades wishing to impress their girls. The revenue which accrued to him

from this chance possession set him thinking; and a project to purchase a second-hand aeroplane and take passengers up from the baseball diamond had to be nipped in the bud by the wild-eyed Dean of Freshmen, who learned of it just in the nick of time.

When Toby had been two months in college everyone knew him by sight, and almost everyone had paid him money. Despite the antiquity, fragility and general worthlessness of some of the things for which they had paid him, they liked him. They said, "You've got to hand it to him." They said, "Say did you know he was *in France?*" The Class of 1923 elected him president, and reelected him in Sophomore year. The best fraternity pledged him. The captain of the football team nodded as he passed him. "McLean." Then, suddenly smiling, "How's the boy?"

Toby always said, "Fine, thanks." But as a matter of fact he never felt very well just at that moment. The sight of the football captain was sufficient to remind him that he had played football once, and could no longer. He had loved football. That the injuries to his leg and his neck prevented his playing it in college, fulfilling his early promise (which his mind exaggerated, until he seemed to himself to have been a potential Brickley or Mahan) was a terrible thing. It was such a terrible thing that he always drank deeply during games to forget it . . .

This habit was his ultimate undoing. At a game in November of his Sophomore year, he succeeded in forgetting not only his grief, but himself, the faculty, and the world at large; with the result that between the halves he, alone, took over the gridiron, and tore down its length for a touchdown, hugging under one arm a bottle, with the other straight-arming the out-of-doors—falling prostrate

at last at the feet of two grim policemen, who promptly yanked him up and escorted him out.

Fifty thousand hilarious onlookers booed the policemen, and a celebrated New York columnist devoted a column to Toby, calling his touchdown "the outstanding pantomimic performance of the season."

But the President expelled him just the same.

He left college richer by several hundred dollars, a roadster and countless friends, than when he had entered. The friends were his for life. The roadster, two hours away from the campus, passed into the possession of an ex-doughboy whom Toby had picked up on the highway. The doughboy was walking south. His shoes were incredibly worn, and he had two thousand miles to go. He coughed dreadfully. But he was cheerful. That was what tugged at Toby's heart: the darn fool was *cheerful* about it. Smiling, and full of hope. "Guess I'll make it," he said, "some way."

It took argument, Toby with Toby. "What do I need of a car, anyhow? A car in New York's a nuisance. Garage rent. Never can park . . . It isn't as though I'd bought it. Saved money a long time and bought it. I just got a great break—and here's this poor guy—"

"Listen," he presently said, "can you drive a car?"

"Sure can! I used to work in a garage."

"Well, listen," said Toby. "Where I'm going, I don't need this car, do you see?" He looked at the doughboy. The doughboy looked blank, so he added, "I've got lots of cars, do you see? Three or four good cars. So I don't need this one."

He jerked the brake suddenly, and Giddyup-Whoa skidded perilous yards to a standstill. "Tell you what I'll do with you," said Toby, reaching in a trousers pocket.

"I'll match you for this car. Heads I keep it, tails it's yours."

Without looking again at the doughboy, he flipped a coin. It spun silver for an instant in the sun, then lay flat on his palm. They stared at it. "Heads," said Toby. There was a short pause, then he cleared his throat. "Well—make it two out of three—"

He flipped the coin again. This time it was tails.

The doughboy found his voice; a queer, suffocated voice. "Say," he said, "wait a minute!"

Toby pretended not to hear. He flipped the coin a third time—and hastily closed his hand.

"It was heads again," said the doughboy.

"Tails."

"No. Heads it was. I know."

"We-ell—" said Toby.

He restored the coin to his pocket and slid low in his seat. He crossed his arms on the steering wheel and surveyed the road ahead. "You see?" he said. "That's how I am. I *can't* lose. Never could. That's the way it is, some guys are shot with luck, and some—"

He stopped.

"I couldn't of took it anyway," the doughboy said.

In the end, Toby sold him the car, for an I. O. U. and a *Croix de Guerre*. The one he would destroy. The other he would return by mail. "What's your address?" he asked very casually when they parted.

He wrote it down.

"What's yours?" said the doughboy.

Toby said, "I'll let you know."

But he never did.

He was a reporter for the next two years. "For the experience," he told himself. He wanted to Write (the

word in his mind had a capital W) and this was the way people said you ought to begin . . . He covered police courts. He covered the piers. He covered the heart of Broadway. He learned a great deal, but he felt that he really got nowhere. His time was absorbed, and he saved no money at all toward future leisure. A city room was, as they said, an excellent prep school for writing; the trouble was you didn't graduate.

He perceived that the boys in the sports department had a good deal of spare time, especially in winter; and they made good salaries, as newspaper salaries went. If he were a sports writer, he could live well, write fiction galore on the side—and when he had written enough of it to establish himself, quit, and be a fiction writer exclusively.

So he reasoned, in 1922.

They put him on sports. He covered the Brooklyn ball club that first summer, travelling about to Boston, Pittsburgh, Cincinnati . . . Sleeper jumps. Terrific heat. A thousand words a day. "The Robins pecked three runs from the Pirates in the first game of today's double-header." He wrote nothing else. He was weary, and slept late of mornings. In the afternoons he sat in balconies in sunny ball parks, marking in a little latticed book. In the evenings somebody had a quart, or somebody knew a blonde . . .

His returns to New York were always too joyous to be literary. Too many people were always too glad he was back.

The season ended. There was the World Series; then, at once, football began. He had looked forward to the football season. "Nothing to do between weekends." But it was amazing how the weekends absorbed the weeks. One Saturday saw him in Ann Arbor. Another in Anna-

polis. Another in Champaign, Illinois. Weekends lasting sometimes from Thursday until Monday, making other work impossible.

In December, Toby had a two weeks' vacation. "*Now!*" he said to himself. On his first day of freedom he wrote a fiction story of a ballplayer and a girl and another girl. The story was called "Strike Three" and he was tremendously pleased with it. He sent it to a magazine. While he waited for a report on it, he rested from his labors, and by the time it came back—to be torn to angry shreds—his vacation was over.

In January he fell in love, briefly but engrossingly. In February he went to Florida with the New York Giants, remaining until late in March. His second year as a sports writer began with the month of April, and the second was like the first. And the third like the second.

He was always away, or busy, or tired, or emotionally upset. There was always some sufficient reason why, *today*, he could do nothing creative, beyond the counted words required of him . . . In time he ceased to expect to do anything "today"; even his mental "tomorrow" became "soon." He had money enough to live on. Just living—working, playing, getting there and back, and sleeping sometimes—crammed the hours.

He spent six weeks every winter in the South, and lay in the silver sand. He accompanied pugilists to their training camps, and golfed with them. He knew a bootlegger, a good dance place, and at least one party girl in every Big League baseball town. He was lightly in love almost all the time, always with spectacular young women. A svelte red-lipped divorcée in Chicago one summer. A famous artist's model one spring.

He wrote stories in press boxes covered and uncovered, in Pullman cars, in tents and telegraph offices. He wrote

stories signed by tennis players, polo players, outfielders, a racing-driver's widow, a boxer's manager—and by countless temporarily incapacitated brethren of the sports-writing fraternity. Stories were written for him upon occasion. On one occasion forever memorable, when loyal friends failed to consult one another, no less than four accounts of a single baseball game, each signed "By Toby McLean" (who lay asleep in a Turkish bath meanwhile) reached his editor, provoking the laconic answer, by wire, "Yes, yes, I believed you the first time."

Once he changed papers . . .

The Bulletin one warm day sent him to cover the annual regatta at Poughkeepsie. He was to do the lead story, delivering it straight from the scene over a field telephone installed for the purpose. The thermometer registered 92°, the race was late in starting, and the field-glass case slung over Toby's shoulders contained no field glasses, but instead concealed two neat flasks of Scotch whiskey. These, sitting in the sun on a cliff by the river bank, he emptied.

In time he rang his office on the field telephone. "The McLean story," he said with difficulty, "'zready."

"Shoot it," they said.

Toby took a deep breath. "Poughkeepsie, N'York. June—June what. By Toby McLean." He paused. He had forgotten what he meant to say. Perhaps he had never known. But as his eyes wavered toward the streaming figured ribbon of blue, inspiration was born.

"Here they come!" he began. "Here they come! Here-they come!"—

"*The-e-ere* they go!" he concluded, triumphant.

So he left the Bulletin, and went to the Star . . .

"And," said Toby McLean to Ann Vaughn, "then, in the twenty-seventh year of the young man's life, he met little Ann Vaughn—"

Across the damask and silver and glass, he smiled at her. She was beautiful, Ann. Her eyes were beautiful, dark and shining in their incredible frames. Her mouth was beautiful as a strange bright flower. Her face that had been so pale in the rain was pink with a little rouge, or with the warmth of this crowded supper room. Or perhaps with a reflection of the burning that was in him, Toby, regarding her with eyes grown grave, grown stormy, all at once.

They knew each other well now. In the past hour, at this table, they had exchanged opinions, reminiscences—selective autobiographies; they had found with excitement that they liked the same things, enjoyed the same books and plays and people. They were very good friends now. And they were something more. Something potentially intense, of which both were aware.

Toby let his eyes fall. With a burnt match in fingers not quite steady he marked on the table cloth, little meaningless marks. He was thinking back over that hour. Things Ann had said . . . Of him: "I like you, Toby McLean. You're mad, and I adore mad people." Of herself: I'm ambitious, you see, Toby. Oh, ridiculously! I've got an engine in me that won't let me rest. It's bigger than my capabilities, I'm afraid—like a Rolls motor in a Chevrolet body—it shakes me to pieces." Of life in general: "I don't pretend to know what it's all about—but I think it's grand; don't you?" . . .

Toby dropped the burnt match in an ash tray, and sat back. "What about love?" he inquired.

"What about it?"

"What do you think about it?"

"Oh, I believe in it," Ann said earnestly.

She put down the spoon with which she had been eating a cupped moon of orange ice. She folded her hands, and rested her chin on them, and looked at Toby. Her eyes neither flirted nor invited; there was merely abstract interest in her voice. "Don't you?"

Toby nodded.

"Ever been in love?" he said.

"Once."

"What happened?"

"Nothing," said Ann. "The boat got to Cherbourg—You know how it is."

"You never saw him after that?"

"Once. About a year later. Just a few weeks ago, it was." Ann mused a moment. "He suddenly looked like a horse," she said solemnly then. "It was the most curious thing."

Toby laughed loudly; too loudly, he thought, and he abruptly checked himself.

"No one else?" he presently asked.

"No. Oh," Ann amended, "of course, the usual slight flurries at odd moments. But—no one who meant anything."

"And you're not in love with anyone now?"

"No."

"You will be," said Toby.

There was a pause.

"You've got to be," said Toby.

He sat forward and leaned on his crossed arms. "Because," he said, "I've decided we're going to be married."

"Really!" gasped Ann.

It was by no means a question, but Toby chose to answer it precisely as though it had been. He nodded his head.

"I think so," he said. Then his glance flushed up. "Don't you?"

"I—hadn't thought——"

"It's on the cards," said Toby. "I knew it—the minute I met you. And I knew it when I read your piece, because I was so proud. Then I said to myself, 'Why are you proud, you ass? What right have you to be proud of her?' And the answer—Do you want to know what the answer was, Ann?"

She was looking down at her spoon, fingering its handle absently. Her lashes were exquisite etchings on ivory. "I—sort of do," she said.

"Look at me, sugar."

The lashes came up slowly, as if weighted.

"That's the answer," Toby said, low, after a long moment. "I'm in love with you."

Then they sat very still. All over the grill room people—gay people in moist mussed clothes—were moving; leaning, gesticulating, cutting with knives and forks. Rising and dancing. But the two in the corner were still. They were listening, under the tumult, to the echo of Toby's words; it was as though they dared not stir, lest they lose it.

Ann spoke at last, in a small voice, haltingly. "You've known me—exactly two hours."

"Makes no difference," Toby said. "I *know*."

"Things don't happen like that."

"No. They don't. But this did."

Another silence. Then Toby sat back in his chair, slid his hands into his trousers pockets. With his chin digging his chest and his eyes regarding the lights in his water goblet, he began a monologue.

"You don't need to say anything—now—unless you want to," he said. "But I had to tell you. And I want

you to think about it. There are other things I ought to tell you, too—that's only fair. About drinking, for instance." He cleared his throat. "I don't know what you've heard about that in connection with me," he continued, "but whatever it was, it's probably pretty true. I like the stuff. I always have liked it. I was bounced out of college because of it, and thrown off the Bulletin because of it, and I still get tight pretty often—and in a big way." He paused, to allow that to sink in deep. Ann must know, now. She must know everything.

"The reason," he said then, lifting his head and meeting her eyes directly, "the reason is, that there's never been any reason why I shouldn't, d'you see, Ann? Nobody to care if I did or didn't. Nobody to want me not to."

He believed it himself. "Liquor hasn't got me," he said. "Don't think it! I can take it or let it alone. Once I was on the wagon for four whole months. I could go on indefinitely—if I wanted to."

He paused again. "If I had you, I'd want to," he said simply. "And that's that."

They thought about it. The eyes of each were fixed on things on the table; neither could have told you what. Ann twisted a match folder around and around in her fingers. Toby's hands were in his pockets still, the thumbs outside. They did not hear the dance band playing "The Birth of the Blues," but always thereafter that tune, played anywhere they were, would check their words and for an instant make their faces dreamy.

A waiter came, removed Ann's orange ice, and crumbed the table; set fingerbowls before them, and the supper check on a plate. Absently Toby turned it over and glanced at the total. He laid a bill down. The waiter scurried off.

"And about women—" Toby said.

Ann stirred in her chair, interrupting. "Don't," she commanded him gently. "You needn't feel you must tell me—things like that. They're none of my affair. Even if—if we were married some day, they wouldn't be. As long as they're over with—"

"They are."

"Then that's enough."

Toby parted his lips, as if he would comment or protest. Then he closed them again. He reached for cigarettes, took one, and tapped it on the table's edge. "'If we were married.'" He repeated it musingly. "Of course," he said, "I suppose I'd make the world's worst husband—"

"Oh," said Ann, "unquestionably!"

Her eyes were laughing. Toby, looking into them, laughed too. Then he sobered.

"Well, now, *why* would I?" he presently demanded, as if it had been Ann's idea. "I believe I'd make a very darn good husband, now I think of it. Because look! I wouldn't be jealous. Or domineering. I wouldn't try to run your life for you. I believe in *individuals*, Ann. You're one—if there ever was one—and I'd respect that. Always. I'd respect your work, and your time, and your right to do as you chose. If you felt like keeping your job, you could. If you didn't, you wouldn't need to. I wouldn't want you to cook, or clean, or grub around with housekeeping—but if you craved that sort of thing—which you wouldn't, would you?—you could have it. You'd be free, do you see? Free as you are now. All I'd ask of you would be to live where I lived, and smile at me sometimes, and let me buy your little shoes, and flowers for your shoulder and typewriter ribbons—"

"And put the ribbons on for me," interpolated Ann, "because I hate to so."

"And put the ribbons on, because you hate to and shouldn't have to."

They considered this, smiling.

"We'd work together," Toby said. "Do magazine stuff. Do a novel apiece, maybe. Make names for ourselves. We'd have a baby some time if you wanted one—not unless. I personally don't care much. And we'd play together! Go places and see things. *Travel*. Go to Italy, and Spain. And home would be a studio apartment full of books, and great fat chairs, and firelight in the winter—"

He stopped. His eyes were seeing the apartment. The books, and the firelight—and Ann. He looked over at her. One pink-tipped hand supported her chin. Her expression was rapt. Her eyes were seeing too. And they were shining.

"Go on," she said softly. "Tell me more."

CHAPTER THREE

THE wedding guests, numbering forty or fifty, could have produced among them a complete and quite remarkable newspaper. There were various reporters, male and female. There were a managing editor, a sports editor, two city editors, a Sunday editor, three rewrite men, and eleven sports writers. There was Harriet Cottle, perfumed and silken, who told men what to wear and signed the admonitions "Harry." There was Charlotte Hull, who wrote serials. There was Nick Standish, author of the "Bagdad-on-the-Subway" column in the Star, whose breakfast costume was a dinner jacket. There was old man Flaherty, keeper of the morgue—the graveyard of dead news and rotting clippings—at the Bulletin. And there was the cartoonist, Hamburg; and Eunice Hay, greatest of sob sisters; and the star photographer, Evan Jones; and big Jake Jacobs, specialist in crime. People like that. People whose tired bright eyes were surprised at nothing, awed by no one. People of a terrible wisdom—and a beautiful tolerance. People who loved laughter, knowing the tears of the world. Newspaper people.

In addition, there were present Toby's janitor's wife; a cornet player who had lent him money; four or five old friends of Ann; and—because he liked Toby—Jack Dempsey, still with thin cuts on his face. The stage was represented by a famous dancing team, and baseball by an umpire and an outfielder and the little hunch-backed mascot of a club.

The ceremony was performed in church, at high noon.

The breakfast that followed was served in a private dining room at a big hotel. It was, taking it all in all, a very elaborate wedding, considering the haste with which arrangements had been made. Ann's father, summoned from Portland to meet a sudden son-in-law-to-be, was responsible. He had insisted on the church, the guests, the organ music, and the wedding breakfast. The Municipal Building, with Shorty Ross and Eunice Hay beside them, would have better pleased the bride and groom.

They had known one another five days and fourteen hours. "And," Toby said, "twenty minutes."

Everyone felt very misty-eyed and sentimental about them. They were so beautiful, so right together. When they looked at one another, you quickly looked away—stabbed as with a knife by that sharp glory. You thought, "It will not die," (though you knew better.) Toby and Ann would never be like other married couples. You pictured them, those vivid children, fabulously living; forever twenty-odd, forever happy,

CHAPTER FOUR

THEY went to Atlantic City for three days only. They called it a weekend, not a trip. With the World Series at hand, and college football coming after, Toby could not be spared for long just at this time; and Ann had been unable in the past five hysterical days to compose more than four movie columns in advance . . . They took a portable typewriter to Atlantic City with them, having vowed, until the last minute, that they would not.

"Put that," Toby said to the bellboy, "on some high dark shelf."

Their windows overlooked the sea. They had a suite of rooms—Toby being Toby. A costly and spacious suite of rooms that royalty might have occupied, with elaborate hangings and fixtures, and mirrors everywhere. Over it they strewed their personal effects in immediate intimate confusion. The result, the marriage of Ann's things to Toby's things, pleased them inordinately. "Look," said Toby, on their second day there. "Look at this." He smiled, but his voice was somewhat husky. He was looking at Ann's little feathered mules, side by side with his tan leather slippers . . .

Ann cried a little, tight-clasped in his arms. "I can't b-bear it," she said. "They're so dear——Oh, Toby, it *hurts* me!"—

Later she said, abruptly, "Darling. Don't let's go away from here, ever."

Her eyes were sombre, frightened almost, fixed on the

symbolic shoes. "We're so happy," she said. "I hate to change *anything*—I didn't think there was perfect happiness in the world, did you? And maybe there isn't—in the world. Just only here." Her eyes met Toby's. She made a sad little gesture with her hands. "How do we know? *This* is all we're sure of."

But such moods came seldom. Usually their spirits were high, their viewpoints quite insanely sanguine. They made glittering plans. Sitting close together on the cooling sand, windblown, with the sea's song in their ears, they planned by the hour. Things they would do. Tales they would write. Pitfalls they would avoid . . .

"On matrimony," Ann said, "I have theories."

"Have you, honey?"

She nodded, lips compressed.

"Dish out a few."

They were on the beach again. They had been there, in the sunshine, all this halcyon September afternoon. It was too cold for bathing, and they were dressed in sport clothes. A gray golf suit and cap. A little scarlet sweater suit. Their shoulders were rounded a trifle, their arms hugged their up-propped knees, their heels, flat heels and spool ones, dug the sand. Ann had pulled off her hat: it lay beside her, weighted with a stone. Her boy's hair, that was still so triumphantly feminine, was ruffled, and the sun had found red and gilt in the brown of it.

"You know something?" Toby said.

"What?"

"You're gorgeous."

"I like you too," said Ann.

"All right, now. Go on about the theories."

"Well," slowly, "for one thing—married people ought to go out sometimes with other people. Separately, I mean. They ought to have dates."

"Why?" asked Toby.

"Why not? It's wise," said Ann. "It's an intelligent precautionary measure. If you can take some other girl to dinner whenever you want to—with my full knowledge and consent—you won't feel nearly so much like seeing her without it. And the same applies to me, with some other man.

"In other words," she added, "we shouldn't forbid one another the jam. Then it won't look so tempting, ever."

"It won't anyway to me," retaliated Toby promptly. "What do I want of jam, when I've got—*all* the honey?"

Ann's face remained earnest. "Variety, of course," she said. "Something different. Don't be silly, darling. You know how people are, as well as I do."

"People, yes."

"We needn't think we're exceptions."

Ann leaned forward, and picked up a small pearly shell. "Tell me," she said, fingering it, "who were you wining and dining—when I came along?"

"Nobody special. I told you that."

"I know, but who in general? For instance," she elaborated, "suppose, two weeks ago today, Shorty Ross or somebody had phoned you, wanting to get up a foursome to go night-clubbing that night. Whom would you have called?"

She tossed the shell away and, cheek on the summit of her knees, peered sideways at Toby. He was gazing drowsily at the sea.

"I don't know," he said. "Some doll who could dance—Joyce Frazer, maybe. Or Dot Nash. Do you know Dot Nash?"

"No. Who's she?"

"Nobody. Just a girl who gets around. I thought you might have run across her."

"And who's the other one? Not," Ann added hastily, "than it matters."

"Joyce Frazer. She's a fashion artist," Toby said. "Nothing to me—but a good wag on a party. Dresses well, dances marvelously, and never drops her cigarette-butt in what's left of her Welsh rarebit."

Ann smiled. "She sounds nice," she said. "Well—when we get back, you take her out somewhere some evening."

"Is this an assignment?" Toby demanded, amused. Then he frowned. "And in the meantime—who's going to be taking *you*?"

"Oh, any one of several people."

"This theory," said Toby, "leaves me cold."

"If you won't be serious, I won't go on."

Toby became serious. His face grew thoughtful, and he shifted his position so that he half-reclined, leaning back on one elbow. "I suppose your reasoning is sound," he admitted. "I'd know it was—for anybody else." He pondered a moment, poking holes in the sand with his forefinger. "But we don't have to inaugurate the system right away, do we? I mean, not for a week or two."

His voice was beseeching, and Ann laughed, and leaning over, kissed him swiftly. "Darling! Of course not. It's for later."

"Do that again."

"I won't. Those people are looking."

"Do it anyway."

So Ann did it anyway.

They decided solemnly, sitting there on the sand, that they would always tell one another everything. "*Everything!*" They could bear anything, forgive anything, except deception. And they would always trust one another, never be suspicious . . . Ann was to keep her job because she would be happier, "—and," she assured Toby, "a lot

more interesting to you." Toby was secretly dismayed to discover that his salary exceeded hers by only five dollars a week; but he salved this wound to his pride by a proclamation to the effect that *his* money was to pay all bills. Also, he would save some money, from now on. "Econ-omize," he characteristically said, "on necessities, never on luxuries."

It was upon their return to the hotel after this heart-to-heart talk that Ann received a business telegram. It lay under their door. Toby as they entered picked it up. " 'Mrs. Ann Vaughn McLean,' " he said. "Hey-hey! How's that for a name?"

"Is it mine?" Ann asked wonderingly. "What's that 'Mrs.' doing?"—

She had taken the telegram and opened it, and now, standing still in the parlor of the suite, she fell silent while her eyes absorbed the message.

"Damn," she said.

"What is it?"

"The office. Wouldn't you know?"

She read the telegram aloud:

JULIETTE ARNOLD AT AMBASSADOR ATLANTIC
CITY REPORTED MARRIED TODAY TO POLISH
COUNT PLEASE COVER THIS

WILLIAMS

They stared at one another, expressionlessly.

"Juliette Arnold," repeated Toby, "married—Hell, *that's* not news!"

"I wish it wasn't," said Ann. "But it always is."

She smiled a small, half-apologetic smile at Toby, tossed her hat to a couch, and dropped into a chair. "Oh, Lord. And I've got to do it, of course."

There was not in either newspaper mind the slightest question of this. But Toby looked disturbed, and somewhat angry. "Confound it," he said, "they might have sent somebody. This is a hell of a note—on our honeymoon!"

"There wouldn't be time. And anyway," said Ann, a shade jealously, "it's my story."

Juliette Arnold was a movie star.

"You can't expect a paper to have a heart," Ann added, "even if one of the cogs is newly married."

She sat a moment longer, drawing the yellow slip through her fingers. "Well—" she sighed then. And stood up.

"Going over there?"

"Going to do some telephoning first."

She took up the instrument, unhooked it, and turned her back on the writing desk on which it had stood, so that the edge supported her. One buckled shoe was crossed over the other, and a forefinger with a pink shiny nail manipulated the hook impatiently. "Operator . . . operator, will you get me the Ambassador, please . . . yes."

This was a business-like Ann, with a crisp, quick, business-like voice. Toby from the window seat watched and listened. His eyes were moody. He tapped his cigarette to remove the ash oftener than there was an ash to remove. "Why do I feel like this?" he thought. "It's ridiculous."

It was. But he could not help it. He felt troubled, annoyed at this professional intrusion—annoyed particularly (and here was the rub) that it was Ann's work, not his, that had intruded. If anyone had to work during this honeymoon, it should be himself. The prospect of sitting here, idle, with nothing whatever to do, while his

bride rushed out to cover an assignment, was somehow humiliating. It was somehow insufferably reminiscent of cartoons of men whose wives made the family living . . .

Ann was talking to Juliette Arnold's maid. "The New York Chronicle-Press," she was saying. "Chronicle-Press, yes. Miss Vaughn, tell her. V-a-u-g-h-n."

Above the transmitter she winked one eye gaily at Toby. He made, in response, a little salute with his hand. Then he turned to the window and eyed the sea without seeing it. "I'm a damn fool," he thought. "Why, this will happen often! She'll be busy when I'm free—and vice versa. For instance, days when I haven't a game or anything, she'll be working. I won't mind that, will I? Of course not!"

But he minded this.

Ann left ten minutes later, hatted, furred and freshly tinted. She kissed him goodbye, and shook him slightly by the shoulders. "Don't look so *tragic*, darling! Your wife will be right back!"

"My wife," Toby said queerly, "—is a newspaper girl—"

There was a pause. Ann's grip on the cloth of Toby's coat relaxed. Shadows darkened the eyes that searched his face. "What do you mean by that?" she asked slowly.

"Nothing."

"Tell me, Toby."

"Nothing," he said again, more convincingly this time. He kissed her, feeling contrite and ashamed. "Nothing at all, honey. I just wished, just for a second, that you were Mrs. Toby McLean—and nothing else, d'you see? But I'm over it now."

Ann's eyes were still shadowed. Questioning. Her white teeth worried her lip. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure." He smiled blithely, to prove it. "Positive," he said.

But he lied.

§

The apartment into which they moved when they returned to New York was a four-room one on East Ninth Street. They had chosen it for its living room, which had an open fireplace with a step, oak rafters, many bookshelves, and a huge sheet of leaded window facing south, rising from the baseboard to the ceiling. An artistic living room, made, they thought, for creative people . . . It offended them a little that the previous tenant, a Mr. Vidabeck, had owned a laundry.

From the living room, three steps led down to a hardwood gangplank of hall and the doors of the one bedroom and the bath. The kitchen was a cupboard adjoining the living room. It contained a stove with two burners, a porcelain sink like an overgrown soap dish, and a yellow-painted icebox three feet high and two feet wide. Ann was enchanted with the icebox. She said it was "adorable and cunning." But Toby, looking anxious, said that all the ice it would hold at one time could be set in a ring.

Into these rooms came Oriental scatter rugs, two couches, several easy chairs, a painted bedroom set, a brocade to hang on a dagger, a pair of seven-branch wrought-iron candlesticks taller than Ann, and other things made possible by wedding-present checks and, beyond those, by high young optimism. Into the rooms also came Toby's private stock (nine quarts), his golf clubs, his portable victrola and a leaning tower of records, his ten suits, his twenty-one custom-made shirts, his books, and his dirty-faced banjo . . . And Ann's hats and shoes and gowns and frothy underwear, and her doll with the

dangling legs, and her boudoir pillows, and the scrapbooks of her stories, and her Roget's Thesaurus, and the pile of Pullman towels she had collected in her travels to use for wiping off cold cream . . .

They had the usual difficulties. The truck that left Toby's former landlord's house at ten o'clock one morning, laden with his Lares and Penates, was located at half past four that afternoon, in front of a restaurant-bar-room around the corner. A delivery man thrust one of the legs of a table through one of the panes of a window. There were not enough floor plugs. The shower bath, despite a shower curtain, rained in a radius of some yards. The mattress of one of the twin beds fitted, but the other was much too small. "Am I," Toby asked the store indignantly, "a Singer midget?"

The decorators could not promise the draperies before October fifteenth, and the wary telephone company would not promise anything. Ann's electric iron, two lamps and the coffee percolator were made for alternating current; the current in the apartment was direct. They drove nails into walls and then changed their minds and had to plug the holes with putty and paint them. Their combined libraries only half filled the bookshelves built (surprisingly) by the laundry-owning Mr. Vidabeck. They filled the rest by two methods: Ann's, which was to beg the book department of her paper for all the review copies lying around; Toby's, which was to betake himself to a neighboring book shop and rapidly run up a bill three figures high.

That they ever got settled at all was a miracle, for their settling—their shopping and unpacking and arranging and rearranging—had to be done in odd moments, between assignments, or late at night. The Star and the Chronicle-

Press continued to come out relentlessly, and as Toby said, "Our Publics must not suffer.

"Especially *my* Public," he added fondly. "He's so nice."

The World Series began before they were finished. Two games in New York, then the clubs—and the correspondents—would leave for St. Louis. They were to be gone five days at least; longer if it rained.

"I suppose," Ann said, "I'll live through it. Somehow."

She would not go, insisted that she could not possibly go. The days preceding Toby's departure were dreary with argument.

"If you'd only come with me!"—

"Darling, you know I can't."

"You could," Toby always thought, "if it weren't for your job." But he did not say it.

"There's this place to fix." Ann would speak hurriedly, as if she read his mind. "I couldn't go away and leave it, with things being delivered all the time, and electricians and telephone men pounding on the door—"

"When you hear any telephone men pounding on the door, let me know."

"They may come any time. And *besides*—we can't afford it, Toby. You're on an expense account, but I wouldn't be, and it would cost a lot to take me all the way out to St. Louis and back, and feed me, and all. And we're awfully broke, already. I was figuring yesterday—we've spent——"

"Don't tell me."

"All right. I won't. But the point is——"

One of them always concluded the discussion, for the nonce, by saying bravely, "Well. After all—five days isn't long."

"No, it really isn't," the other would agree.

It was a century.

On the afternoon of the opening game Ann had to attend a preview of a picture; but she went to the second game, to be with Toby. He was leaving at six-something, on the newspaper train. They were sad all day. In the special bus marked PRESS with its escort of police on motorcycles that rushed them sensationally uptown to the Yankee Stadium, they held hands under cover of a copy of the Star, and Toby muttered grimly to the bus-driver's back, "Go on. Hit something. See if we care." In the little noisy smoky room in the labyrinth under the grandstand where salad and rolls and spumoni and coffee were served to the baseball writers, they could not eat much, nor could they smile very heartily when genial friends joked them on their impending separation . . .

The press box was a high steep bank of faces under felt hats, with here and there a woman's face. The countless pairs of eyes, scanning the diamond down below where men in clean new uniforms were practising, were like so many marbles threatening to drop on Ann and Toby, whose seats were in the second row. They sat forward, resting their arms on the board that served as a writing table. Toby's telegrapher sat at his right; Bill Hastings, also of the Star, was beyond Ann. Ahead of them a radio announcer in a gray slouch cap already talked into his microphone. An assistant slipped him scribbled suggestions.

"At two o'clock," Toby dictated to his telegrapher, "the stands were full to overflowing——"

Here and there in the press box, other telegraph instruments and a few typewriters were tapping and clicking; hailstones, forerunners of the storm. Uniformed boys were running about with sheafs of blank telegraph paper. Pencils were being sharpened, scorebooks laid out. At the

foot of the center aisle nearby a man was arranging the placards he would hold up during the game for the men of the newspapers to see. "H." "A." "E." . . . Black letters on white cardboard, signalling the feats or failures of batters and basemen.

"That's all for now," said Toby.

He turned to Ann. Her face was averted, she was saying something to Hastings on her left; but as Toby eyed her profile she suddenly looked around, as if his eyes commanded her. Together they knew a curious, breathless moment: the whole scene fell away, the stands, the patterned green below—even the men whose elbows touched their elbows had no existence, and the world was only the tiny space between them, spanned by their gaze. A moment like part of eternity, and yet so brief that when it was over the foul ball knocked from the plate before it began still coasted down the silver slope of wire above their heads.

"I *can't* leave you," Toby whispered, his face twisted. "I *love you so*——"

The next instant he was leaning forward, peering alertly down and around at the stands where thousands rose in a great sudden speckled wave. "Came the Babe," he said casually aloud.

He did not look again at Ann. He could not trust himself to look at her. Hunching low in his seat, mashing his cigarette-stub out, he resumed dictation:

"Babe Ruth appeared from the dugout at two-fifteen, and the crowd——"

CHAPTER FIVE

IN ST. LOUIS there was carnival; this World Series was the city's first in three decades. The train that brought the pennant-winners in was met by hordes, who pummeled, clawed, and all but maimed for life their conquering heroes. The sports writers, arriving an hour afterwards, found a town gone mad, with sirens screaming, everybody on the streets, and traffic standing stock still, as if parked.

It took Toby and Bill Hastings an hour to reach their hotel in a taxicab, and when they alighted at the entrance, into the midst of a throng, Toby was whacked from the rear by a thing called a stinger. This was quite too much. He wheeled, and casually hit the nearest man bigger than he that he saw. There ensued a miniature riot from which, hatless and panting and happy, he was rescued ultimately by police. The police were unreasonable and they took him to jail, where he languished for two hours; then Hastings, with the aid of a St. Louis newspaper man, got him out.

The incident somehow miraculously raised his spirits.

For three days then he slept late, breakfasted at lunch time, betook himself to the ball park for the afternoon, dined (abstemiously, for he was on the wagon) in the special press bar, telegraphed fifty words to Ann, and went to the movies. Parties, of which there were many, did not tempt him, nor did the manifold jests and jeers called forth by his sedentary program move him at all . . .

One night about midnight he opened heavy eyelids to find his room bright-lit and full of people. Shorty Ross had brought in a party of seven, including two young women, one of whom was pointing at Toby, crying in a shrill voice, "Ooh, he's *beau-ti-ful!* *Buy* me him!"

"Sold," said Toby politely.

But ten minutes later, after he had wrapped himself in a toga of bedclothes, thrust his feet into slippers and risen to play host, he was discovered asleep again in a chair in a corner . . .

On the day of the last of the games in St. Louis he yodeled so exuberantly during his morning shower that the occupant of the room above his room protested via the pipes with the heel of a shoe. Before he went down to breakfast he packed his suitcase and shut and strapped it; ready for the train at six-thirty p. m. There were presents for Ann in the suitcase. A bottle of perfume, wrapped in a wadded blue pajama jacket. A *robe de nuit* of palest apricot chiffon with ribbons and lace. A pair of earrings, a patent lighter, The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke in fine tooled leather, and an evening dress. He was a little anxious about the dress. She might not like it. She might just smile and pat his cheek maternally—and put the dress away and never wear it. But he had had to buy it. It was white velvet, silky soft and small and beautiful, and to have left it in a St. Louis shop window, on a form with a bright pink throat and no head, would have been a crime.

He had won eighty-eight dollars on bets and bridge in the past few days. The rest he borrowed from Shorty Ross, who, he was cheered to learn, owed it to him anyway. "I have since St. Petersburg," Shorty said calmly, "last winter. Don't you remember? I was playing Santy Claus to a Little One with the sole out of her stocking—

and just then you got a bonus from your paper. This is it."

All that last day Toby was gay, and when the train pulled out that evening he was the gayest young man aboard—though he was sober. He dined preposterously. He visited friends in the various cars. He sang in quartets at the top of his lungs, and participated in crap games: and when Bimmy Nichols succumbed to corn whiskey and they auctioned him off in the aisle, Toby was the superlative auctioneer . . . The contrast between his current mood and his mood of the Westbound trip, which had been glum beyond words, did not go unremarked. After a little preliminary low-pitched rehearsal in a corner, three vocalists burst out abruptly with a ballad about it, to the tune of "The Old Gray Mare"; and when he repaired to his compartment at two o'clock in the morning, he found pinned to the door a magazine advertisement of the Before-and-After-Taking school, with appropriate animadversions added in pencil . . .

He did not sleep for a long time, for hearkening happily to the loud glad onward hurry of the wheels.

§

Ann was not at the station. He had wired her the time of the train, but she was not there, and though he waited about for several minutes, she did not appear. He went to a pay station booth and ascertained from Information that Toby McLean had, as yet, no telephone. Then he chartered a taxi and drove home.

Ann was not there either.

A lamp glowed. The apartment was beautiful, its glass-curtains hung, its rugs put down, the Mandarin coat Ann had bought at an auction thrown brightly on the little

grand piano. The studio looked not only settled, but lived in. There were new magazines in a line on the table, their ends overlapping. There were dry crumbs of fudge in a silver dish. Ann's pocketbook lay in a chair and her cigarette holder marked her place in a new novel. Her typewriter was open, with paper in it. These things Toby noted subconsciously, listening to the silence that followed his joyous roar of "Ann!" from the threshold.

He tried it again, less surely. "Ann?"

She was not here. Not anywhere here. He had been away endlessly, and now he was back, and she was not at home to welcome him.

"Well!" he said.

He let the door slam, and thumped his suitcase and his typewriter down. Standing motionless between them, he planted his fists on his hips and frowned at the emptiness. But the shape of his mouth was less angry than hurt, and the eyes under his drawn brows worried and wondered. Where was she? And—*why?* This wasn't like her, at all.

Then he spied the note. It was scribbled in pencil on yellow copy paper, and attached to a chair in his path by the sort of long pale-headed pin that pins orchids.

"Darling," it said, "I am so *sorry!* But you'll forgive me when you hear the heavenly thing that's happened. A man named Austin Hackett, who is editor of Picturesque (you know: the movie magazine) is going to pay me *two hundred* (\$\$ not cents) *apiece* for six impressions of movie stars—with an option of six more at *three hundred apiece!* Did you ever hear of anything so grand in all your life? This just broke today, and tonight was our only chance to talk it over as he leaves tomorrow for Hollywood where they publish—so I *had* to go to dinner with him. You

see how it was, don't you? It breaks my heart not to meet you at the train—but I'll be home the first minute I can. By ten, anyway.

Your,

ME"

Toby looked at his watch. It was twenty-three minutes past nine.

He removed his overcoat, and sat down. He read the note over again. Then he read it a third time. Then for an interval he merely sat, the paper in one hand, the other hand absently stabbing the arm of his chair with the pale-headed pin.

He thought, "That's great for her. That's simply great. It's marvelous."

He thought, "Of course she had to go! A thing as important as that. My God, wouldn't anybody?"

He thought, "Six times two hundred is twelve hundred. And six times three hundred is eighteen hundred. Eighteen and—That's three thousand dollars."

The *Star* had promised him a ten-dollar raise after October first. He thought about that. Thought deeply about it, stabbing and jabbing the arm of his chair with the pin.

When he looked again at his watch, it was nine-forty-five.

He began to roam the rooms, his hands shoved deep in his pockets. His course was aimless. After two or three turns of the studio, he descended the steps to the bedroom, which he lighted, surveyed from the doorway for a moment, and then entered. Ann's things all around. The ghost of her perfume, drifting. Small frivolous festive shoes on their sides on the floor. There was the telegram he had sent from the station at Harrisburg,

lying spread out on her dressing table, under a snarl of pearl beads . . . His heart that had been a little numb ached suddenly. He had dreamed of such a different homecoming.

He went back up the three steps slowly. In the kitchen he drank a glass of water. He reentered the studio, paused at the piano and stood eying a sheet of music without seeing it. "And even when she gets here—" he thought dully. It would not be as he had dreamed it, even when she got here. Her news would intrude. The things she would have to tell would be more important, more exciting, than the fact that they who had been apart were together—"Well, why not?" he said angrily to himself. "Good Lord—they *are*!" But saying so did not seem to make it true.

He wandered on.

Why couldn't a man who was leaving tomorrow for the Coast talk business in the morning? The Century didn't leave till afternoon—and the Wolverine didn't leave till *evening*—

A ten-dollar-a-week raise was five hundred and twenty a year. "Fine!" Toby grunted. "Fine! If she buys herself a car, I can buy a gadget for the radiator cap."

Four of the panes of the huge window, like a little hinged door, stood open. He leaned out, and spat emphatically to the court below.

The paper in Ann's typewriter had nothing written on it. It was just there. Blank. An invitation. Only an inch or two of it appeared on the front of the roller, and the carriage was far to the right, all ready to go. You could begin. You could just sit down and *start*, and in a little while you would have something. An article, maybe. A short story, to sell . . . That story someone had told that very morning on the press train, about the

girl who danced in a dive in New Orleans; that was a knockout plot for a fiction story. "She was born bad." That would be the opening line. Just those four words. A wow of a line!

Toby swung a long leg over the little chair and seated himself at the typewriter. He hit the space-bar five times with his forefinger to make an indentation, and wrote the line. Period. Space, space. He sat back. Then with one hand he pulled the paper from the machine and made a yellow crackling wad of it.

No use starting tonight. Ann would be home any minute now. . . .

He resumed his march.

§

Ann was late. At ten she had not come. At ten-fifteen she had not come. At ten-twenty-five Toby descended to the street and stared up and down. There were taxis, and girls' bare heads and ivory throats and flowered shoulders, dimly, fleetly glimpsed through taxi windows. But no Ann. . . . He went back upstairs. He hurried back, three steps at a time. It had just occurred to him that Whosis the editor would be with her in the taxi. They must not find him teetering on the curbstone, like a fool.

He was no sooner back in the studio than the street doorbell rang three quick times. Then three times more. "There!" he cried aloud. He wheeled, and wildly thumbed the button that released the latch downstairs. His heart was pounding. All his melancholy, all his vague alarms, were gone. The sound of those rings, so impatient, so eager and *glad*, had banished them all.

He wrenched open the door. "Hul-lo there!" he bel-

lowed, into the echoing hollowness of the hall. And from two floors below, up the well of the stairs, Ann's joyous answer floated: "Hello *yourself!*——"

He had reached the first landing of the downward flight in his pellmell rush to meet her, when he suddenly stopped, and listened. There were two voices. Hers, and a man's. He could hear them laughing together, he could hear their mounting steps, confused and scratchy on the carpetless stone stairs. "Oh—my—God!" groaned his mind. "Now why's she bringing *him* up? Now just exactly why did she have to do that?"

He thrust his face, the forehead knotted with a fresh dismay, over the bannisters, and peered down. He could see the tops of their heads. Ann's little brown head, boyish head, jaunty and adorable. And a sleek blond head that inclined attentively toward it. . . . While he still hung over, clinging to the rail, Ann's face unexpectedly lifted toward him. He dodged back before her eyes caught him; and finding his shoulders against the wall, he leaned there for a sullen moment, debating whether to saunter on down or to tiptoe quickly back up. He decided upon the former course; and after giving his coat collar a tug with both hands, adjusting his tie, and pushing his fists into his pockets, he recommenced his descent of the stairs—this time at a dignified rate of speed, and somewhat stiffly.

They met on a landing further down. "*Darling!*" cried Ann. A breathless little cry, with a catch in it.

Their embrace was brief. For just an instant he felt her cool bare arms about his neck, pulling his head down. Her mouth pressed his, for just an instant. Then she released him, and half turned away. "My husband—Mr. Hackett——"

Mr. Hackett had just achieved the landing. He was

a plump short man in dinner clothes, slightly out of breath with his climb. He had a pink face, the extreme baby blondness of which was unrelieved by any dark pigment in brows or lashes, or in the very small mustache he wore. Even his eyes were pale, like faded marbles. And they were hard like marbles.

He gave Toby a hand that had a ring of some sort on its little finger. "Mr. Vaughn," he said, "how-do-you-do?"

His smile was bland. He seemed unaware of the slip he had made, and he undoubtedly was. Yet Toby's eyes narrowed ever so slightly, and his lips that had parted to murmur politeness closed. "What's he doing?" he thought. "Kidding me?"

Ann was amused. "McLean, Mr. Hackett," she corrected him smilingly. "Vaughn is only my name. I forgot you didn't know."

"Oh, I see," Hackett said. "I'm sorry. Mr. McLean."

"That's all right," Toby said.

But it had been unfortunate. They all felt that.

There was a tiny pause. Then Ann turned to Toby, and slipped an arm through his. "Well!" she cried gaily. "Let me look at you! How *are* you, anyway? How was the trip?"

"Fair."

"Are you as glad as I am that you're back?"

Toby smiled sightly, ironically. He said nothing, and after an instant Ann went on speaking quickly, her color heightened. "Let's go on up, shall we? Why do we stand here?"

She let Toby's arm go, and started ahead. "I lured Mr. Hackett in," she smiled back over her shoulder, "by promising him the best whiskey sour in New York—made as only you can——"

Her eyes said plainly, "*Please*, dear. Be nice. For my sake."

"I hope we have all the makings," she added aloud on an unaccustomed note of housewifely anxiety. "I can't seem to remember seeing any lemons lately—but maybe we'll find some somewhere."

She mounted the stairs on the run, her lovely legs twinkling conspicuously before Hackett and Toby, who followed her side by side. The silver sheath of her wrap left a trail of subtle fragrance behind her. Hackett kept his eyes lowered. He and Toby were out of step, and their elbows repeatedly bumped. "Get in step, you!" Toby thought grimly. He himself would not. Nor would he straighten his arm by removing the hand from his trousers pocket, where it feverishly fingered a dime and a St. Louis press button.

He hated Hackett. He told himself that he would have hated him—anyway. If he had seen him on the street, he would have. Hackett was too smug. He was too pudgy, and too pink. "Rosie," Toby's mind named him. "May be High Hooper-dooer to Ann, but he's Rosie to me."

It pleased him to manufacture things he would like to say to Rosie. He found two answers to everything the little pink man said. One was the monosyllabic, barely polite reply to be spoken; the other the caustic irate retort to be thought. When, entering the apartment, Hackett observed, "What a charming little place you have here," Toby said merely, "We like it." He thought, "*Listen*, you snooty little bastard! One more crack like that, and I'm going to sock you—right—on—the *nose*!"

There was some justification for him. Hackett's demeanor really was a shade superior and condescending. When he queried, "You're a sporting writer, Mr.—er—

McLean?" it was obvious that this branch of journalism was held by him in rather low esteem. Also it was plain that he had enjoined himself to be kind to little Miss Vaughn's odd husband. . . . Toby was stung into a reply more curt than any he had yet uttered.

"One of those cases of arrested development, yes," he said.

Hackett's straw brows lifted a quarter of an inch. He seemed about to say something, but thought better of it, and sipped the drink Toby had mixed for him instead.

"Very nice," he commented. "Have you ever tried adding the juice of a lime?"

Ann was distressed. Her eyes, very bright and wide, the pupils dilated, alternately besought Toby not to be difficult and Hackett not to mind him *please*. She talked nervously and fast, and sat forward on her chair as though prepared to throw herself bodily, as well as conversationally, between the two should occasion arise. Toby felt a little sorry for her, and a little penitent. But only a little. Her attitude toward Hackett, so respectful, so impressed, hardened his heart.

"Just a yes-girl!" he thought bitterly.

It appeared that they were late because after their dinner they had called upon Norman Astaire.

"Who's Norman Astaire?" Toby asked. Which was absurd. Everyone in the world knew who Norman Astaire was, and Toby himself had seen his latest picture in St. Louis only two evenings before. But he wanted to show this movie editor that the movies really weren't so darned important . . .

"Darling," said Ann, "I think, if you'll rack your brain——"

Her eyes were suddenly cool to him, and scornful.

"There's no excuse," they said, "for your acting like this."

She went on with the story. They had gone to see Norman Astaire, who was staying at the Plaza. One of the "Impressions" was to be of him, and he was leaving for Hollywood tomorrow on the same train with Mr. Hackett—She was lucky to have caught him before he left; he was the only one of the chosen subjects whom she had not previously met and interviewed.

"I think I'll do that one first, Mr. Hackett," she added, "even if you don't want to run it first. While it's fresh in my mind."

Now that she was more annoyed at Toby than grieved, her poise seemed to have returned. She relaxed in her chair and entered into discussion with Hackett of the articles, the length they should run, the dates upon which they should reach him. . . . She ignored Toby, as did the editor. Their conversation excluded him, and he sat smoking cigarettes in lofty silence—squirming inwardly with the consciousness that he had made a fool of himself, and growing momentarily angrier and more likely to do so again.

Hackett presently turned to him, smiling his faint smile. "Do you do any magazine work yourself, Mr. McLean?"

Toby thought passionately, "Knowing *damn well* I don't!——"

"You flatter me," he said.

"Toby is going to do some fiction this winter," Ann declared.

"Indeed?" murmured Hackett.

Toby's lips quirked, without mirth. "No, probably not," he said drily.

There was a short pause. Then Hackett observed, "I

trust I may be forgiven for taking Mrs. McLean off this evening——”

“Oh, surely. Of course.”

“Business is business, you know.”

“Yes,” agreed Toby. And looking directly at Ann, he added, “And ladies must live.”

Ann looked thoughtfully back at him. She seemed to look through him, and neither to see him nor to have heard what he said. After an instant she rose, without haste, and picked up the cocktail shaker. On her spool-heeled silver shoes she moved across to Hackett, extending the shaker invitingly.

“Thank you, no,” he said. “No more.”

“Just a drop.”

She filled his glass.

When he had emptied it, he made his adieux. Briefly to Toby, though pleasantly enough. Lengthily to Ann. They stood for perhaps three minutes at the door, while he gave her final instructions. “Remember, deadline the twentieth of the month. . . .” “You might send them air mail if you’re pressed for time.” . . . “I’m going to get LeClerq to do line drawings, just the heads, for illustrations.” . . .

“Yes,” said Ann. “Yes. Yes, Mr. Hackett.”

“Oh, get *out*!” thought Toby. “Before I throw you out!”

From the other side of the room, where he ambled about in the caged fashion of a man who wishes to sit down but cannot yet, he heard the door close at last. He wheeled then. Ann was standing with her hand on the knob, regarding him.

“Toby,” she said, “you were perfectly horrid.”

She looked so beautiful standing there, outlined against the dark door. Like a beautiful paper doll stepping out

of a page—except that no paper doll was ever so serious as that, nor ever drew its thin dark brows together. . . . Toby had a warning that he must not think how beautiful she was, lest he forget his grievance and his defense.

“*Why* were you?” said Ann.

“I don’t know that I was.”

“Well, you were. You were rude, and sarcastic——” She stopped abruptly, and the severity of her expression broke into little-girl lines of acute distress. “Oh, honey,” she cried in a tiny wail, “how could you? When you knew what it meant to me to—— Oh, what’ll he *think*?”

“I don’t care what he thinks!”

“Well, *I* do! I can’t afford to offend a man who’s going to pay me all that money——”

“I can,” said Toby. “He isn’t paying it to me.”

“But you’re my husband!”

Toby smiled grimly. “Yeah,” he said. “*Mister* Vaughn! So I heard.”

His jaw tightened. He flung himself away and, with his back turned toward her, began a blind hunt for a cigarette. On the table. On the desk. . . .

“There’re some in that box,” Ann said absently.

He found one, and lit it. When he turned back he found that she was eying him strangely now, with a curious despairing look in her eyes. She came forward a little.

“Toby,” she said, “this job is the nicest thing—professionally—that’s ever happened to me. Aren’t you—can’t you be glad for me, at all?”

“Of course I’m glad!”

“You don’t act it.”

“Well, I am. I—that’s not it.”

“Well, what *is*, then?”

“I——” began Toby. And stopped. What was the

use? He couldn't make her understand how he had missed her, how he had counted on her being here when he came. Those things were real to feel, but if he said them, they would sound childish, petty. . . .

He said instead, rather violently, "What was the point of bringing that fellow Hackett up here? What was he for? To chaperon our reunion?"

"I wanted him to meet you," Ann said. She added wearily, "Optimist that I was! I thought I'd be—proud of you."

"And you were ashamed, eh?"

"I most certainly was!"

They were angry now. Across a yard of space that was miles of spiritual distance, they confronted each other, standing very still. Ann's chin was lifted, her hands clasped her hips, her small silver feet were tight together. Toby's fists in his pockets hunched his shoulders high, and his head was thrust belligerently forward. He thought, panic-stricken, "*God*—this is *terrible*, when I love her so——" A thought like a flash of lightning in the dark storm of his mind; and as soon gone.

Some such thought must have come to Ann too, for after a time she averted her eyes, and her hand raised itself to push her hair back from her white right temple in a gesture of weariness and pain. "I think," she said, and her voice was a little shaky, "we've reached the point—where we'd better not say any more—now—either of us."

She turned away. Toby, standing where he was, watched her take up her evening wrap listlessly from the divan where she had thrown it and walk towards the steps that led to the bedroom. Her heels tapped loud on the hardwood floor between the several rugs. The pompom of pale fresh tulle on her shoulder quivered stiffly. Her

neck was living ivory, and in the nape of it a tiny perfect arrow of hair grew down. . . .

Toby's mind cried, "*Wait!*" His mind strode after her, and caught her, and kissed the spot where the arrow of hair grew down. His mind begged her forgiveness, chokingly. But only his mind. His body stayed motionless, with pride for its anchor. And he did not speak at all.

Ann disappeared. The bedroom door closed behind her; not dramatically, but very firmly. "Please stay out," it said.

After that there was no sound.

CHAPTER SIX

WHAT sleep Toby had that night, he had in the studio, on the divan. Sometime after Ann's door closed—he had no idea how long after—he dragged himself out of the chair into which he had dropped when she left him, and made preparations for rest. His suitcase still stood near the door, with his typewriter. He hoisted it to a table and opened it, seeking pajamas and his dressing gown. From the rolled-up pajama jacket the bottle of perfume for Ann fell out, and crashed to the floor, and broke. He stared at it; left the pieces there in the spreading aromatic stain.

He turned out the lights and lay down, with a scarlet satin cushion for his pillow and a small Oriental rug from the floor spread over him. He knew that sleep would not come for hours; and it did not. He was too miserable. He was too bewildered. What had got into him? *Why* had he behaved so, and how could he have said the things he had said? And realizing, as he did now fully, his own entire culpability, why did he not get up and go to Ann and say he was sorry? He could not seem to; and this—this stubbornness in the face of reason and inclination—bewildered him most of all.

Across the garden court that lay beyond the great studio window, people in another apartment were having a party. Their phonograph ground out one after another of the season's popular tunes. "Do-Do-Do." "Sometimes I'm Happy." "Someone to Watch Over Me." Once or twice they forgot to wind the machine, and it ran

down gradually, gratingly. Toby gritted his teeth. "Ah, have a heart!" The night was hideous enough, without that.

"Some-times I'm hap-py

"Some-times I'm blue-oo-eee-mmm-zzzz. . . .

When he woke, it was bright morning in the studio. For a drowsy half minute he had no thought of where he was, and then for a confused instant, during which he sat bolt upright, he could not think how—

Oh.

Recollection filled the blankness in his eyes with dark anxiety. Still sitting upright, an elbow against the back of the divan propping him, he surveyed the room. It was empty except for himself, and impertinently gay, even garish, with sunlight. At the other end of it the door to the kitchen stood open; he could see the coffee percolator on the little gas stove, over a ring of blue beads. Ann was awake, then.

Simultaneously with this discovery, he heard the remote renewed sound of a typewriter; somehow he knew it was renewed, not just beginning. Ann had taken her machine into the bedroom, and closed the door, so as not to disturb him. Or so as not to be disturbed?

He lay back to ponder the question, pulling the silk puff over him, for the room was cold. Then abruptly he reared up again, clutching the puff. This silk thing—Ann must have spread it over him, tucked it in all around. The rug with which he had covered himself before he went to sleep lay now, curled on the floor, beside the couch.

"Say!" he said fervently, aloud.

He bounded up, throwing the puff aside. He reached for his dressing gown, shrugged it on, and started for the three stairs to the bedroom. He had almost reached them

when he wheeled, and his rapid barefoot steps went off at a tangent, towards the table. His suitcase lay there, sprawled open. Visible in the suitcase was the evening dress he had bought for Ann, only partially hidden by a pile of shirts. He wondered briefly if she had noticed it.

His slippers came to light after some search, and he dropped them to the floor and stepped into them. He found a comb and raked it swiftly, twice on each side, through his hair. Then he started for the steps again, plunged down, and opened the bedroom door.

Ann was at her dressing table. On its plate-glass top her typewriter rested, among toilet articles and jars and bottles pushed far to the sides. She wore a scarlet velvet bathrobe with its sleeves rolled high above her bent busy white elbows. Her back was towards the door. "Oh, hello," she said to the mirror, without turning.

"Hullo, Ann."

Their eyes held, via the glass. Toby thought, "*Now. Tell her I'm sorry as hell.*" But the words stuck. Ann's eyes were so unfathomable, masked.

"Working?" he asked idiotically.

She nodded.

"Today's column?"

"No," said Ann. "That's up. I did two yesterday." Her glance fell to the typewriter. She struck a key with her forefinger, then raised her eyes to Toby's reflected ones again. "I'm trying to get a lead on the interview with Norman Astaire."

"Oh, I see."

There was a pause.

"Well——" Toby said tentatively. "I won't disturb you, then——"

He pretended to intend to leave. Ann turned in her chair, as he had hoped she would; but she did not turn

with the quick restraining gesture for which he had hoped. She simply turned. There was another pause while Toby waited for her to say, "You're not. Don't go." He neglected to realize that she might be waiting, too.

The pause grew over-long. "Well," said Toby again. He still had hold of the doorknob, and he gave it a twist, in the manner of a reluctant small boy. "See you later, then."

"There's some coffee on the stove," Ann remarked tonelessly. "And I fixed you some orange juice. It's in the icebox."

"Oh, all right. Thanks."

Still he did not quite go. "And thanks for putting that cover over me," he said. "That was awfully sweet of you, Ann."

Ann's eyes strayed away from him. Her voice when she answered sounded little and flat and very tired.

"I—didn't want you to be cold," she said.

They looked at each other; and all his love for her seemed to catch Toby by the throat and shake him. He heard himself make a husky inarticulate sound, he felt himself start forward, and saw Ann start. . . . Then he was crushing her fiercely close, saying little broken things; hoping very much that her face that was hidden against his shoulder would stay there a minute, lest she see his eyes and think him a *baby*. . . .

"I guess I was jealous," he admitted sheepishly, somewhat later. "I guess that's the answer. Damned masculine egotism getting up on its ear, because you're going to make more money than I can——"

Ann interrupted him. "Silly! Not more than you *can*. More than you do right now, maybe, but——"

She hesitated. "Toby," she said very earnestly then,

"listen. Do you think for one minute that, no matter how hard I try, I can ever achieve the success in this game you can achieve—if *you* try?"

"Of course I do!"

"You're mad," said Ann. "I never can. I've got a little something—but I haven't got what you've got, and I never had it, and I never will."

She was clever, Ann. Or perhaps she was sincere, and fully believed what she said. Toby denied it, sincerely. Nevertheless he felt soothed, he felt somehow better. . . . In a little while he was telling her the plot for the short story:

"Joe Blake told it on the train coming home. Actual fact. This girl in New Orleans, a cabaret dancer——"

He devoted five minutes to enthusiastic narrative.

"Grand," Ann applauded. "Oh, honey, that's a *marvellous* plot!"

"I'm going to begin it, 'She was born bad,'" Toby declared complacently at the end. "Just those four words."

"Grand!" Ann said again. And then, unexpectedly, "When?" she asked.

Toby glanced up sharply. "What do you mean, when?"

"When are you going to begin it?"

"Oh," said Toby, "why—tomorrow——" And then, because the word mocked him, his jaw tightened, and he said, "Tomorrow morning, damn it! You see if I don't!"

§

Their days went smoothly after that for some little time. There were no more quarrels and no more separations. The apartment was finished, the Series was

ended, life became normal at last—as normal as life in a newspaper family can be. It seemed entirely usual to them, who knew no other, and to whom the average domestic regime would have been unnatural and strange.

For example: Bedtime to the young McLeans was two a.m. or later; days began at noon and reached their zenith after dark. Breakfast was eaten at lunch time, dinner at dinner time, and supper at midnight; and typewriters chattered loud when the world was still.

Ann as a general rule spent her afternoons chasing copy; seeing new pictures, interviewing stars. Toby usually remained at the apartment. At six p.m. or thereabouts (the Star was a morning paper) he went to the office. Ann in the meantime, either at her office or at home, composed her movie column for the morrow.

Toby also during this season had a column to do, in addition to his regular assignments. He was ghost-writing for Barry Brent, a last year's famous halfback, whose expert football comment—"SIZING 'EM UP by Barry Brent"—was a popular and exploited daily feature of the Star all through the autumn. Toby and Brent, now a bond salesman, met once or twice a week. Theoretically the meetings were for the purpose of planning the columns; actually they were not very business-like. They took place at Brent's favorite speakeasy, where he could almost always be found around five in the afternoon. Toby, smoking incessantly to take his mind off the fact that a long Tom Collins could be had by lifting a finger, would inquire if Brent had anything special he wanted to say in his story tomorrow.

Brent would think deeply. "Well, let's see. What did I say yesterday? I have it home, but I haven't had time to read it."

"Well, you said to watch Flash Johnson——"

"Watch who?"

"Johnson, of Penn."

"Oh, yeah," Brent would agree vaguely. "Sure. Well, and what else? Hey, Jack! Again on the dry Martini." . . .

Football was of course the most important thing in life, and would be until after Thanksgiving. Every Friday morning Toby McLean predicted in print the outcomes of the morrow's games. Every Monday he discussed "Saturday's upsets." He covered a game every Saturday, and Ann, who loved football, always accompanied him. On Saturday nights they celebrated, either in the college towns or in New York if the distance was not too great for returning.

On Sundays they held open house, and many people came. Journalists, athletes, picture people.

They were very happy, Ann and Toby. Their happiness was made of little things. Breakfasts on a painted tray between their twin beds, with the autumn sunshine spilling through the windows. Midnight talks by firelight in the shadowy studio, where they sat side by side and close together on a rug, their backs against the divan's edge, their feet stretched toward the fire, and smoked, and thought aloud in lazy voices. Raids on the icebox just before retiring. Twin cigarette points, red in the bedroom dark. Little intimate jokes they had, secret significances; nicknames and code-words, privy only to them. Cheerful small scuffles for possession of a paper, or a chicken drumstick, or the bathroom mirror. Duets on their typewriters, and the interval thereafter, when they read aloud what they had written, to be praised.

Ann was doing remarkably well on the magazine articles, and Toby, eager to atone for misdemeanors in that

connection, was helping her as much as he could. When the first one was completed he insisted upon copying it, and devoted one whole evening to this stenographic labor of love, producing at the end a flawless manuscript with two carbons that Ann said was too beautiful for words. They drove to the postoffice with it at twenty minutes of three in the morning, and reverently watched it vanish into the slit marked AIR MAIL.

Toby squeezed Ann's hand. "There you go, baby," he said softly. "You're off now."

He was working himself. He had begun the story of the cabaret girl in New Orleans—not that next morning, but within a week of it. By the end of October it was half written, and he had rewritten that half three times. He was discouraged and disgusted; and only Ann's encouragement and the silent ceaseless nudge of her example kept him going. . . .

He had also begun an interview with Glenna Collett, designed for magazine use, and an article about professional hockey. A page and a half of Miss Collett and four or five pages of hockey were completed, and he read these over every day. Sometimes he found them good, and added paragraphs to each. Sometimes he cut paragraphs out. . . .

§

Their bills on the first of November were numerous and large, and—to Ann—alarming. The ones contracted during the first days of their marriage, in September, had a familiar look, and little reminders were added to one or two. "Your attention is respectfully called," etc.

"I'm afraid we'll have to do something about them, Toby," Ann said.

"All right, honey. What'll we do?"

"We might pay them."

Toby looked interested. "Using what for money?" he inquired.

With the advent of cold weather, their breakfasts were being served on a cardtable beside the studio fire. This conversation took place at one such breakfast. They were very indolent; they lounged at utter ease in the deep corners of the divan, against cushions. Toby had finished his coffee and set the cup and saucer aside, on the linen cloth that covered the green baize top of the cardtable. Now he fished cigarettes from the pocket of his dressing gown and lit one for himself and one for Ann.

Ann accepted hers absently. "Well," she said, "to begin with, there's that money they owe you for your expense account. It came to about two hundred and twenty, didn't it?"

"Oh, yeah. That."

"You haven't collected it yet, have you?"

"No. Or—well, yes. I collected it."

"Well, where is it?"

Toby hesitated; Ann wasn't going to like this, and he didn't know that he could blame her. "Why, as a matter of fact," he said guiltily, "I lent it to a fellow in the office."

"You didn't!"

"Oh, he's all right," Toby said quickly. "He'll pay it back. We'll have it by the end of this week—or next week at the very latest."

"Who did you lend it to?"

"One of the rewrite men. O'Neill, his name is. I *had* to, Ann," he assured her with tremendous earnestness. "The poor guy's absolutely up against it. His wife's an invalid—and he's got more kids than the Old Woman in the Shoe——"

"Did you lend him all of it?"

"All but the twenty. You see, the thing was," Toby explained, "he needed two hundred dollars to——"

"But darling, we needed it *ourselves!* The worst *way!*"

They argued for a quarter of an hour. At the end of that time Toby by dint of an impassioned recital had succeeded in convincing Ann that O'Neill's case was indeed a pathetic one. "But," she insisted, "I still don't think it was up to *you*——"

Nothing could convince her of that.

"You're precious," she said finally, slowly. "You're a grand big-hearted——"

"Sap," grinned Toby. "Say it."

"Person," said Ann, "and I adore you for it—but Toby McLean, if you ever do anything like this again when we're as hard up as we are right now, I—I'll leave you!"

She laughed a little at the preposterous threat, and Toby laughed too.

"Try," he said.

"And now," said Ann, burrowing in his pocket for another cigarette, "we return to my original question. What are we going to do about those?"

With the cigarette package she indicated the sheaf of bills on the table.

"We're going to cremate them. Or I tell you what," Toby continued genially, "We'll rule the backs of them and use 'em for bridge scores——"

Ann ignored him. "There's that fifteen hundred dollars in my savings account," she said, as she said several times before. "Plus that first two hundred from Mr. Hackett——"

Toby checked her. "Here! None of that."

"But darling, just as a loan. You could pay me back."

"No. Uh-uh." Toby was shaking his head decidedly. "Don't think I don't appreciate your wanting to, honey, but—that's out."

Ann's voice was a little wail of dismay and exasperation. "But what are you going to do? You *can't* just overlook these bills!"

"Who can't?"

"You can't indefinitely——"

"Well," said Toby equably, "I won't, indefinitely."

He lit his fourth matutinal cigarette, flicked the match to the fireplace, and picked up the morning paper. With a hand over his shoulder he tugged the cushions into a more comfortable arrangement at his back; then settled into them, with the newspaper. His practised thumbs found the sports page at once, and he spread the paper wide and folded it there. As far as he was concerned, the subject of money was dismissed; at least, so he made it appear.

"I see where this fellow Toby McLean predicts a victory for Dartmouth," he remarked. "Which means, of course, that Yale will win by three touchdowns——"

His voice trailed off. He was silent, reading; half critically, half proudly rereading his own story, as newspaper people do. He seemed absorbed in the printed lines—once he grunted irritably, detecting a typographical error that ruined a phrase—but in reality the thing uppermost and vital in his mind was the sheaf of bills he pretended to ignore. Because they worried Ann, they worried him, who had always heretofore been magnificently careless in such matters. What if he *couldn't* pay them? If his salary continued to cover only everyday expenses, if no extra money came in from anywhere,

if O'Neill didn't pay him back and neither did others with older debts—and eventually he had to borrow Ann's savings after all? What would she think of him then as a protector and provider? And what would he think of himself?

"Damn it to hell!" his mind fumed. Something certainly had to be done.

"And," his mental voice concluded, "*quick*."

He glanced over at Ann. She was motionless, gazing into the fire. She wore the scarlet velvet robe, with its belt tied tight about her slim waist and its tailored collar flipped up, accidentally picturesque, behind her head. Her knees were crossed, and she swung a bare foot tipped with a mule of scarlet leather; its loose heel every now and then, when she arched her foot, came up and slapped the sole of her heel. She had pushed the left cuff of the robe up her arm almost to the shoulder and was holding it there with her right hand. Between two fingers her cigarette consumed itself, unaided.

Toby reached out and gave the soft arm a quick hard reassuring pressure. "*Um!*" he said. "*My baby!*" And then, sobering, stroking the arm with his forefinger, he said, "Believe in me, won't you, Ann? Everything's going to be all right."

Ann turned her head. "I do, Toby. Only——"

"No onlys."

He kissed her to seal her lips, then drew away as the kitchen door opened and the amiable negress recently engaged to cook their breakfast and clean for them peered in.

"Ah, Missouri," Toby greeted her. Her name delighted him, and he used it as often as possible. "And how are the fallen arches this morning?"

Missouri tittered happily, then looked mournful. "They ain't no better, Mist' McLean."

"All right, Missouri," Ann said, "you can take the things." She added, "What time is it?"

"It's most twelve, ma'am."

"It's never!"

Ann would have risen, but Toby pulled her back. "Now, now," he said. "No hurry. Bad for little girls." He looked supremely lazy, lounging there, and rather extraordinarily handsome. "Tell me all about it first," he commanded her. "Whither, and all that."

Ann told him. She must go to the office, because Williams had said he wanted to talk to her, and then she must get a manicure and a wave. She would be at the Biltmore at one-fifteen for a luncheon to be given by the publicity department of Acme Films to the motion picture writers; after the luncheon they would all be driven in cars to Curtiss Field, where some aeroplane scenes for a forthcoming Acme Film called "Up and Away" were to be taken. She ought, she thought, to be back by six o'clock.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I don't know," Toby said idly. "Whittle, maybe."

But he knew very well indeed what he meant to do.

Ann departed to dress. Toby remained slouched low on the divan, scowling now, his chin digging his chest and his thumbs tucked under the cord of his dressing gown. About him Missouri hovered unheeded, clearing the card-table, making elaborate detours around his feet.

Presently, a little fearfully, she spoke. "What you want me do with these here papers, Mist' McLean?"

Her brown hand with the pink palm held out the bills. Toby glanced up, still scowling. "Throw 'em away," he said; then countermanded the order. "Give 'em here."

He took them. Their torn envelopes were among them, and on the back of one of the envelopes, with a pencil brought by Missouri, he set the figures down and found the total. Nine hundred and twenty-one dollars and sixty-three cents. And there were more bills in the second desk drawer. . . .

When Ann reappeared a few minutes later, Toby was seated at the piano, picking out a plaintive thin tune with one finger. He sat sideways on the bench, his left arm in his lap and his body hunched over it; he had somehow the air of a man who would do what he now was doing all the rest of the day.

"By, dear," said Ann.

"So long, sugar."

He rose and sauntered across the big room to kiss her.

"Listen!" he said, hands on her shoulders. "You're to keep out of those planes,—hear?"

Ann nodded, dimpling at his sudden dead-seriousness.

"Promise me," Toby said.

"I promise."

He let her go then.

A newspaper man works best in his shirtsleeves. Toby took a cold shower, and dressed. Reentering the studio a few minutes later, his hair wet and sleek, his soft collar, minus a tie, left unbuttoned at the neck, he was ready; ready, and grimly resolute. He unhooked the receiver from the telephone. He assembled cigarettes, a lighter, a large ashtray. He removed Ann's typewriter from the writing desk and substituted his own portable. He pulled up the straightest, hardest chair.

Seated, he lit a cigarette, inhaled tremendously once, and put the cigarette on the edge of the tray. From the drawer at his knee he drew out the nine or ten double-

spaced typewritten pages that constituted the first half of his story.

CABARET LADY

By
Toby McLean

That much was satisfactory, anyway.

Tilting back precariously on the rear legs of his chair, he read the whole thing. As he read an excitement grew in him. It was better than he had thought it. It was *all right!* . . . Long before he came to Page Ten, he burned to stop reading and get on with writing. His mind was beyond the lines already completed, shaping new lines and phrases. The very sentence with which he would end the story came to him. "Then the spotlight, like a golden cage, closed down around her. . . ."

"Hey!" Toby exulted.

The front legs of his chair thumped the floor. Page Ten ran into the typewriter. With fingers that almost shook, he manipulated the roller so that the next word he wrote would be parallel with the last word he had written. Eyes on that word, intent and shining, he seized his cigarette; attached it to his lower lip, to hang there. And began.

He worked for five straight hours.

Several times the disconnected telephone made small aggrieved noises in its throat. Toby did not hear. Once Missouri timidly asked if he didn't want her to fix him "a san'wich or somethin'" before she left for the day; he waved her away with a flip of his hand. He was stuck for an hour on Page Sixteen and the rug around his chair was strewn with crumpled balls of paper. When he finished that page finally, he knew that nothing would

stop him. He would finish the story now, in a little while.

The room grew blue with smoke; if he had entered it from outside, he would have said "*Whew!*" and gone about flinging up windows. He did not stir. Before him, like a gate in his mind, his final sentence stood, and all the road that led to it was clear. He must approach it steadily, not changing his stride, not shifting his eyes. He had that sense, and had it so acutely that he was almost rigid with the tension, toward the last.

He reached the end; typed the final line; ripped the page from the machine and slapped it down on the top of the pile. For an instant he sat still, holding it under his palm. He could feel all the other pages, plump under his palm. Twenty-one typewritten pages. "*Cabaret Lady*" by Toby McLean.

"And it's good!" he said.

He knew that. He swore softly, happily. He slumped against the back of the chair, and heard himself laugh aloud. It was finished. And it was good.

Now let Ann come home!

Relaxation made him realize, without caring at all, how very spent he was. There were blades of pain between his shoulders, and his head ached. He stretched mightily, flexing his arms; then pushed back his chair and laboriously stood up. He had not noticed the fading light, but now it was quite gloomy in the room. Clutching the manuscript in one hand, he moved about, turning on lamps. Each pool of radiance was blurry and vague with smoke.

He opened the windows. The chill November twilight seemed to slap him in the face, making him physically alive again. He was all at once aware of pangs of ravenous hunger, and he left the manuscript on the divan and betook himself to the kitchen. Emerging a moment

later, bearing a glass of milk and a quarter of an apple pie, he seated himself close beside his story. Then for a time he ate and drank and read.

He read as though through Ann's eyes, thinking, as he had thought subconsciously all the time he worked, of her approval. This was for her. This thing he had wrought was an offering to lay at her feet, saying, "There." And it was more. It was a *proof* of something, most important.

But when Ann came, he strangely did not tell her about the story. He looked at her and thought, "Not yet. I'll wait." He would wait until he sold it—Maybe it wasn't so good after all. Maybe it wouldn't sell. In that case, he would rather Ann remained in ignorance. Her pity would be insupportable.

"You've been working," Ann said when she saw the desk.

Her eyes reverted to Toby's face, hopefully. "On the fiction story?"

"I took a crack at it, yeah," Toby answered.

"Any luck?"

"None to speak of."

He had dropped a big magazine over the manuscript, to hide it. As soon as Ann left the room, he put it away.

It went to an editor two days later, carefully typed and corrected, in an envelope that contained a second stamped envelope, addressed to the author in care of the Star.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE party was entirely impromptu. It originated at eight o'clock on a Saturday evening, in the Oyster Bar of the Grand Central Terminal, where Ann and Toby, Shorty Ross, Chris Hanley and Harry Griffin had dinner upon their return from covering a football game at New Haven.

"I," Shorty said, "am at leisure for the evening. Will anyone do anything about it?"

He looked severely at Toby, who replied, "Doubtless."

Shorty looked at Ann. She laughed at him, and he emitted a groan. "Is hospitality dead?" he demanded. "Where is the lathstring of yesteryear? What's become of the mat with Welcome on it? I view with alarm——"

"Shorty," said Ann, "*do* come to see us."

"Thanks, I will. Can you wait till I finish this coffee?"

"Everybody come," Ann said. "We'll round up some more people——"

They sent Harry Griffin home to get Little Jo, the gilt-haired photographic model with whom he was living, whom everyone liked; as usual, nothing was said about Mrs. Chris Hanley, whom no one liked—Chris, so the rumor went, included. Ann telephoned Eunice Hay, who said she was "utterly frazzled" (she had spent the afternoon by the door of the City Morgue at Bellevue while doctors examined a headless torso found in the Hudson River, and, as she explained, "They *took* so long!") but she promised to come anyway, and requested that a

"devastating male" be despatched to fetch her. Shorty, who had not heard the adjective, volunteered, and set forth amid cheers.

From the apartment somewhat later they made more telephone calls, and located a few more kindred spirits. By midnight, they were eleven; four girls and seven men. The fourth girl was Norma Drake, a friend of Ann's, who had a perfume shop on Fiftieth Street; she came bringing her current fiancé, a genial shell-rimmed gentleman called Skeet. Nick Standish of Toby's paper dropped in fortuitously, and Bugs McDonald, a former newspaper man who was writing plays (his first one had already, as he put it, "played ten months in Belasco's safe"), was reached after eleven-thirty and commanded to barge right over. . . .

Toby mixed innumerable drinks. As bar tender, he wore tied high around his chest an apron of pink rubber trimmed with green. As entertainer, his alternate role, his costume remained unchanged. Perching on a table, one long leg over the other and his battered banjo hugged against the apron, he sang time-honored Blues inimitably:

*"Feelin' tomorrow
Like I fe-e-el today. . . ."*

He had songs of his own, which some of the party had heard. "Sing the one about the Fiji king," suggested Shorty at one a. m.

Toby, smiling, strumming chords, shook his head. "There are ladies," he said.

"Nonsense!" Norma Drake indignantly objected.

"I've forgotten it, anyway," said Toby. "Really I have."

"He has to be oiled to sing that one," someone remarked.

"Have a drink, won't you, Toby?"

"Yes, for heaven's sake!" exclaimed someone else. "Come down off that wagon! Get *normal*! Fun is fun——"

"You should have seen him in St. Louis," Harry Griffin said. "Just leading the life of a Trappist monk was all."

"Ann!"

This was Eunice Hay's voice; cool, mocking. Don't be mean. Let Toby break over, just this once."

Ann was seated on a cushion on the floor between Chris Hanley and Nick Standish, her shoulders slight beside theirs against the wall. She looked up quickly, so quickly that the amber earrings she wore gave little startled jumps against her cheeks.

"At least," Eunice continued, "let him have a couple of drinks. He's too pitiful this way. He's breaking my heart."

"Let him?" repeated Ann.

She sat forward. Her eyes were very wide open and dark, and aggrieved, like a child's. "Darn it," she said, "everybody blames *me*!"

Eunice smiled teasingly. "Well?"

"But I've nothing whatever to do with it! It was Toby's own idea—wasn't it, Toby?"

Toby was tightening a string on his banjo. "A poor thing, but mine own," he quoted amiably.

He was angry inside, with all of them, with their eyes that knew him so well. But he would not let them see that he was angry. In the little lull he played two final chords, and set the banjo down. He got to his feet

leisurely. "Speaking of abstinence and its evils—who's ready for another short snort?"

The lull ended at once in a babble:

"Me!"

"Mrs. Ross's boy!"

"Ready? I am dying, Egypt, dying!"

Toby took the orders and retired to the kitchen, leaving the connecting door open. He was still nettled. "Fools!" he grumbled to himself. "That Eunice! 'Let Toby break over'—my God!"

As he measured and poured, he could hear them talking, six or seven at once.

"—but they haven't found the head yet, nor the legs——"

"—finishing his story, and he raised the window to spit, and two thousand words blew out and gone forever——"

"—just the torso and arms——"

"Yes, isn't he weird? He's like nothing on earth! I was married to him for two long years, but I still don't believe in that man."

"—rye from contented bootleggers——"

"—so the announcer calls out, 'Gregory now pitching,' and the crowd yells, 'Yeah? For how long?'——"

"—the boy-ological urge bothers her a lot——"

Toby in the kitchen slammed the ice-box door. "One thing," he thought grimly, "is sure: the McLeans are going to have a change of crowd, and it won't be long now."

He was standing by the toy sink, holding ice under the faucet, when Ann arrived at his side in a little rush.

"Toby——"

His face softened. "Hullo, beautiful."

Ann locked her hands over his arms and glanced back-

ward toward the door to assure herself that no one could overhear. Her eyes when they returned to him were troubled; they loved him terribly. "Toby," she said, "tell me. Do I—*am* I cramping your style?"

Toby merely looked at her.

"They think I am," said Ann.

"They do not!"

"But they do! Eunice——"

"Eunice," said Toby, "was just being Eunice. Can the kitty change its meow?" He scowled. "There ought to be a law against that doll, anyway. I've always thought so."

"She's one of my best friends——"

"Yeah! Says she!"

"Well," said Ann, "anyway—it isn't only Eunice. It's all of them. Didn't you see the way they looked?" Her expression was tragic. "They think I'm *one of those wives!*"

Toby said, "Oh, who gives a damn what they think?" But the line between his brows belied the indifference of the words. He shut off the faucet and dried his hands on a dish towel. "Well—shall I have a drink, just to show 'em?" he asked.

Ann hesitated. "Do—do you want to?"

"You want me to, don't you?" He disliked the craven sound of this, and amended it hastily. "Sure. I'd like one. Why not?"

They were both a little ashamed of themselves; each avoided the other's eyes. Toby busied himself with cups and ice and a brown quart bottle. Ann fingered a corkscrew absently.

"Well," she said, "not—not just this minute, anyway. Because they'd know I'd talked to you——"

Her tone said distinctly. "But later."

The brief silence that followed was filled by the voice of Little Jo, rising high above the medley of voices in the studio: "Listen, I've got an idea! Let's all roar up to Harlem——"

Ann put down the corkscrew. "I'd better go back in."

Still she lingered. "I suppose I'm an awful idiot, behaving like this," she said apologetically. "It doesn't seem very helpful of me, Toby."

By way of answer he pulled her to him and kissed her. "Sweet!"

"Don't worry," he added, more matter-of-factly. "I'll only take one. Or two. How many have you had?"

"Two."

"Then I'll have two. Conspicuously. Fair enough?"

He had the first drink, very conspicuously, half an hour later, at a table in a Harlem cabaret. The party had migrated there in two groaning taxicabs, taking flasks and bottles along with them. They had descended rickety stairs in step with a ragtime beat from below, signed assorted names on "membership" cards at a desk at the bottom, and entered a fetid noisy little room full of white, black and indeterminate people. Now they sat around a table made of three tables together and wished there was a window to open. In a minute they would become acclimated. . . .

The walls of the room were covered with lithographic-looking paintings of proper youths and maidens that the grime and smoke had dimmed, so that their propriety—the bowing-curtseying type—seemed neither as inept nor as reproachful as it might have. Between the paintings, mirrors reflected faces cheek to cheek, hard-glancing eyes and loose moist mouths; bare arms across cloth shoulders like tight slings. Over each thin mirror a single light bulb hung, in an inverted nest of red crepe paper petals. The

band played in a sort of pit, down two steps. Black band. Jungle band.

"That's *music!*" Harry Griffin cried. "Come on there, small potatoes, dance with me."

"Wait," said Little Jo, to whom this invitation was addressed. "My nose knows I've got to have a drink first."

"Six gingerales and six White Rocks," Shorty said to the waiter. "And set-ups for everybody." He added, pointing to Toby, "—except him. Bring him *aqua pura*, for he is but a boy."

"Bring him milk," said someone else.

"Bring him Mellon's Food."

Toby was draping Ann's coat on the back of her chair. Over his shoulder he surveyed his tormentors, sighed, and pretended to succumb. "You win," he said. And to the waiter, "That glass you keep for cops and prohibition agents. Know the one I mean? This high?"

"Yassuh!" The waiter grinned dazzlingly.

"Bring it," said Toby.

With a jerk of his shoulder he reached across the table for cigarettes, a new package. He opened it neatly, keeping his eyes on it, hoping he looked more nonchalant than he felt.

"You don't mean to tell us," Shorty was demanding, "that the Great Drouth of '26 is *over*? That the rains are about to descend, and the floods——"

"Gimme a light, somebody," Toby cut in.

Ann was complacent, serene, for all to see. "Here," she said. Her right thumb with its glossy pointed shield struck flame from a lighter, and she held it out to Toby's cigarette. Their heads for a minute were tilted together, their faces tinted with light. The little tableau, curiously intimate, had its effect; even Eunice, on the point of re-

marking wickedly that she hoped she hadn't talked anybody into anything, changed her mind.

"Dance with me," she said to Chris Hanley instead.

Then they were all dancing save the extra men, who sat about between the vacant chairs. Ann danced with Nick Standish, her cheek against his lapel; he was so much taller than she that the tie he wore might have been a little bow tied on her hair. Toby, sitting at the table, fingering the extra-large glass, followed her with his eyes. This was no place for her, this dim hot cave full of piebald people. . . . He was suddenly angry, seeing an ebony elbow prod her shoulder. He would take her home, in just a minute.

"Let's have that glass, Toby."

He pushed it over absentmindedly; then drew it back.

"I'll pour my own."

They watched him, eagle-eyed.

"Say, that's no drink!" said McDonald. "Be your profession."

"It's enough."

"Enough my eye! It's all ice! What'd you want the big glass for, anyway?"

Toby thought, "For something to say at that particular moment." But he did not tell them this. Idly he tilted the bottle again over the glass and let a little more of the tea-colored fluid splash in. "How's that?" he asked.

"Well," said Shorty, eying it, "it *might* exhilarate a baby gnat with a weak stomach—then again it might not. But have your way."

"Thanks," Toby said drily.

He poured White Rock into the glass and sat holding it on the table, not thinking of it. His detachment was not feigned. He had lost interest in this drink; the thing important now was to take Ann home, away from here.

He wondered why he had let her come in the first place; decided he must have forgotten how noisome these Harlem places were. Or perhaps he had never known, till he saw her in one, delicate in the mad barbaric gloom.

"Well," somebody said, "here's mud in your eye——"

His hand brought his glass up automatically. Over its rim his gaze, still moody and preoccupied, held to the dance floor. Black, brown, yellow, white. Black and yellow. White and brown. Brown and black. Their heads joggled unevenly, no two in unison, like loose coals in a cart going over car-tracks. The soles of their shoes did a sandy-sounding thing to the burnished floor. The music had them. The music was jerking their shoulders and hips, and flinging their heels. *Umpa-um-mm, pa-um, umpa-um-mmm. . . .*

*"Oh, my ba-by
Say yes
Or say may-be. . . ."*

On the edge of the pit where the band played, two darkies with megaphones were singing the song, swaying as one to its rhythm. A waiter carrying a tray aloft on his palm was singing it. The human herd that churned in a pen too small for it, that threatened to stampede and crash the low white fence of tables, was singing.

"Oh, my ba-by. . . ."

"Hey, what a tune that is!" Toby said to no one in particular.

It had him, now. Under the table the foot that kept time when he himself played was keeping time, the sole beating the floor. He looked at the band, and abruptly

chuckled aloud. How they loved it, these niggers! The little pianist, the massive trombone player—all of them rocked as they played, playing with body and soul. Sweat shone on their faces, and their white teeth gleamed like the teeth of the piano; ivory in mahogany. The trombone player with the blown brown cheeks laughed with his eyes and through his trombone. The banjo player beat for accent on the banjo's face—"T'mp! T'mp!—as if it were a drum.

"Hot!" breathed Toby.

He shifted in his chair, unable to sit still, and his glance encountered his glass. With surprise he noted that the highball was all but gone. It had slipped down like so much water, leaving him no recollection of taste. He swallowed what was left and passed the glass across to Shorty, who had the bottle.

"You were right," he said, "it was a little weak."

Shorty grasped it in a business-like way.

"There!" he said, when he restored it. "Dip your bill into that!"

The music subsided slowly, as if the musicians were moving away; then, with an earsplitting oath of the drum, it stopped altogether. The dancers disbanded, more lights were flashed on . . . and Toby was all at once sick of the place again.

He had half finished the new sharp drink when Ann arrived at the table.

"How does it taste?" she asked.

"Okay. Say, listen, Ann: let's blow, what do you say?"

Ann was powdering her nose with a pad like a lost white polka-dot. She lowered it slightly, in surprise. "You mean go home?"

"Where else? Or," Toby amended, "wherever you say. Only let's get out of here."

"Why? Don't you like this place?"

"It's no place for you, that's the point."

"Pooh," said Ann. "Why, that's silly!" She had begun to laugh, but meeting Toby's eyes she sobered, and her forehead puckered a little. "Darling, after all, I'm not a *child*," she reminded him.

"You are, though. You're too——"

"But I'm not!"

"Here, here," said Nick Standish from beyond Ann. "What's all this?"

Ann shrugged despairingly. "Toby thinks I don't know the Facts of Life, or something."

"Well? Do you?"

"I've been a newspaper woman for four years."

Over the top of her small defiant head, Nick and Toby exchanged a gentle paternal sort of smile.

"Precocious," murmured Nick.

"Amazing," agreed Toby.

"I hate you both," Ann retorted amicably.

Toby found that someone had replenished his glass, filled it up to the brim. He sampled its potent content; set it down. "I'll tell you what I'll do with you, old timer," he said to Ann. "I'll let you stay for one more dance—which you'll dance with me——"

"Yes."

"And then we'll go."

"We-ell," said Ann, "then we'll see."

She twinkled at him, snapped her powder compact shut and leaned forward to ask Little Jo, who sat three chairs away, to lend her some rouge.

"Harry has it," shouted Little Jo. "Or somebody has. I put it in a passing pocket—Listen, everybody, who's got that school-girl complexion? Everybody look in their pockets——"

The room was full of such small shrill confusions, blended into one unremitting cacaphony. To add to it, the band had struck up again. In the spotlight on the dance floor, a large bleached negress was moaning a song about "Borneo-oh!"—supported by a chorus in orange worsted wigs and brief skirts made of beads that swung and rattled. There were eight in the chorus. They had thin tan bodies, the torsos striped by beaded brassieres, the bare flesh heavily powdered with mauve powder. Their legs were bare, and soiled green sandals encased the feet of all but one, who oddly wore black patent leather pumps. More or less together, they executed a careless jointless dance, stamping their shoes and flapping their elbows like wings.

Nobody paid them any attention whatever.

Toby's giant glass was empty again. He refilled it with whisky and soda-water, half and half, and shoveled in ice, meanwhile discussing next Saturday's game with Harry Griffin. "Why, listen, if that Harvard team was going to play *Vassar*, I'd bet on the dolls to hold 'em to a tie——"

In the back of his mind he was telling himself that this drink made two and a half, not three and a half. "First one I had didn't mean anything. Just like water."

The "Borneo-oh" number ended, and the chorus, still strutting, vanished single-file through a curtained aperture. Incredibly soon they began to straggle forth again, one by one, dressed now in assorted flimsy dresses. One of them shouldered a tray tied with a greasy wide red ribbon and went about languidly piping, "*See-gars? Seega-rettes?*" Two others joined a party of college boys at a corner table. Still another—the pretty, olive-skinned one at whose feet a folded bill had landed neatly as she danced—spoke for a moment to two colored men at a

table near the entrance, then crossed to a ringside table occupied by a Dinner Coat with a boutonnière in its buttonhole, and sat down.

The music recommenced while Toby was mixing his fourth highball and explaining to Ann (who had not inquired) that it wasn't his fifth. "The first one didn't mean anything. You ask Shorty."

Ann looked thoughtful. "It's an awfully big glass," she remarked evenly, after a moment.

Toby did not hear. He had said, "There's the music—" and he was gulping the highball. He set the glass down and seized Ann's hand. "Let's go!——"

He loved to dance with her. She was the perfect partner for him. Any other girl as short as she would have been too short, would have dragged with her hand at his shoulder; but Ann by dancing on the tips of her toes and holding her body straight, not bending back, was exactly tall enough. He could hunch slightly, thrust his head a trifle forward, fit his hand to her slim left side at the waist—and do *anything*. Any step. Anything the saxophones suggested.

The present saxophones seemed to suggest quite rapid and intricate footwork, with numerous whirls. This was highly satisfactory until the floor filled up, after which it became a little wearing. Toby, however, persisted; his feet were fascinating his mind—by their extraordinary dexterity making him sublimely impervious to jolts and collisions. He thought he had never danced better in his life; he had never felt so like dancing; and he was astonished and injured to hear Ann presently, in a small winded voice, complain.

"For heaven's *sake*, Toby!"

He peered down at her. "What?"

"You're bumping me into everybody there *is*!"

Toby glared wildly about him. Out of the four nearest couples, six pairs of eyes glared quite as furiously back. "Who do you think you are?" a little man like a rooster wanted to know. "St. Vitus?" Nearby a yellow girl in a pink flowered dress clung with one hand to her escort and with the other massaged a trampled instep.

"Well, the big palookas," Toby growled, "why the hell don't they look where they're going?"

"They tried," said Ann almost inaudibly.

Toby peered down at her again. "Want to stop?" he demanded.

"Maybe we'd better."

This was the crowning indignity. "Why, damn it, she thinks I'm *tight*!" he thought suddenly, outraged.

He stalked from the dance floor after her; pulled out her chair and seated her with precise elaborate politeness. Her handkerchief fluttered to the floor, and he restored it with a small bow. The cavalier gesture pleased him. So she thought he was tight, did she? Well, how about *that*?

"Thank you," Ann said.

He was gracious. "Not at all. Don't mention it."

He seated himself. A waiter was lurking near, and to him Toby held up a peremptory forefinger. "Garçon!"

"Me, suh?"

"Here a moment!"

The waiter advanced to his side.

"May I order you a sandwich?" Toby queried formally of Ann.

"No, thanks."

"No thanks," said Toby to the waiter, adding hurriedly, "—never mind, I mean. Don't bring one. That is—nothing.

"Never *mind*!" he bellowed.

"Tob-y!" remonstrated Ann.

Toby was glowering after the waiter's swiftly retreating back. "Of all the dumb shines ever saw in my life!——"

The incident had been regrettable, he felt, although he was not sure why. Something had gone a little wrong. As he consumed a gin-and-ginger-ale, he mulled it over in his mind. The sandwich. The waiter. Ann hadn't wanted the sandwich, and he had had to scold the waiter. Nothing wrong with that, surely. All the waiter's fault. . . . He came at length to the scintillating conclusion that you couldn't expect waiters to have any brains; if they had any brains they wouldn't be waiters.

He expounded this to Ann. "Point is, if they had any waiters—brains, I mean——"

Ann agreed with him. "Yes," she said. "Of course. Listen, Toby, honey: let's go home now, shall we? Remember you said we would, when we'd had our dance?"

Toby felt gratified that she agreed with him about waiters. He felt inspired to elaborate on the theme, and he did so. "Point is," he said, gesticulating with a flask, "that if a waiter had brains he'd be a *headwaiter*. Wouldn't he?"

"Yes. Toby, listen a minute, dear——"

"And if he had brains an' was a headwaiter an' had brains he'd *own* the place! Wouldn'te? An'——"

There was a good deal more of it. It went on, in fact, intermittently for two hours.

§

In retrospect both Toby and Ann were to date the beginning of trouble from this evening. But at the time they viewed it as a joke. Toby's little defection, that

afterward they saw as the first faint shadow on their horizon, seemed a humorous slight accident, signifying nothing. Ann said it was all her fault anyhow, and Toby, though aloud he blamed himself for his failure to stop at two drinks, muttering irritably that he had had "no guts at all," was inclined to blame the heat of the night club, the hollow state of his stomach, and the length of time that had elapsed since his ascent of the wagon, for this and all his subsequent transgressions of the night.

"Damn stuff hit me like *that!*" he told Ann, with an illustrative snap of his fingers.

This fact dismayed him. It bothered him more than did the ignoble recollection that he and Ann had, as he put it, "let that bunch of bleachers coaches kid us off the base." Of late years he had prided himself on his acknowledged ability to drink much and carry it well; and the chronological account given him by Ann in the morning of his behavior between the hours of two and four a. m. was both a shock and a humiliation.

He kept interrupting. "Well, but good Lord, how many did I *have?*"

"Oh, I don't know exactly. Let's see. I suppose you'd had about eight or nine by that time——"

"And I was playing the banjo in the *band?*" Toby demanded incredulously. His tone seemed to say, "On only eight or nine drinks? It isn't done!" Nor had it been, in the olden days.

"In the band," said Ann, "and between times. You played for a couple of dances, and in between you did solo work. Don't you remember at all?"

"No."

"Well, you did. You made," Ann informed him, dimpling, "a tremendous hit. 'Local Lad Scores Triumph,' in other words."

"Oh, good *Lord!*"

As a result of this episode, with Ann's approbation, he determined upon a new rule for himself: he would have one drink (but only one) whenever he liked. Total abstinence, they decided, had little to recommend it. It wasn't convivial, it always looked smug, it made guests who drank only moderately, but who did drink something, feel subtly criticised and a shade resentful. It was, in short, too much of a good thing; and certainly one drink (and only one) did nobody any harm. . . .

He had a few single highballs at intervals through the week that followed; one afternoon, during a speakeasy session with Barry Brent, he had two in an hour. "But," he observed when he reported this to Ann, "it was coming to me. The drinks that've passed under my nose, and on, in that speakeasy of Brent's, would float the Fleet."

Ann, without saying so, appeared to expect that this doubling of the ration would prove to have established a precedent. But apparently it had not; days went by, and it was not repeated. "One's my limit," Toby told people cheerfully. "Since the night I gave my concert up in Harlem——"

CHAPTER EIGHT

IN the meantime, a college boy fell in love with Ann, in a college boy's abrupt whole-hearted fashion; and Toby, that same evening, met Puff Randolph, aged sixteen. Or perhaps one should say that Puff met Toby.

It happened like this:

They had gone down Saturday morning to Princeton, Ann and Toby, and Alice and Franklin Blair. The Blairs were Philadelphia people, distant cousins of Ann; a pleasant, unexciting young couple with a home of their own, a sedan, a Panatrobe, and, to quote them, "kiddies." They were en route back to these, after four or five days in New York (a wedding anniversary spree, spent chiefly in telephone calls to the nurse), and they had been prevailed upon to return via the Princeton game by Ann, who was feeling contrite about them.

"We haven't done anything for them, Toby," she declared anxiously on Friday. "And they've been here almost a week."

"We took 'em to dinner, didn't we?"

"Only once."

"Is it possible?" Toby mused. "*Could* we have learned all we know about Jojo's adenoids in just one sitting?"

"No," said Ann. "But we did. And we've got to again. We've got to give them a whirl this evening, or take them to the game with us tomorrow—or something——"

So they took them to the game.

Two birds were killed with one stone, really, for Ann had someone to sit with. Women are banned from most

college press boxes, even women of the press; hence the McLeans had to separate when they entered a stadium, and unless someone else had been brought along, Ann sat by herself. "Which," she said, "seems so sort of wistful, at a football game, when you're a girl."

Usually they journeyed to games on a rollicking football special and upon arrival, lunched in Toby's fraternity house, if there was a chapter, or in the gay tumultuous crush of some convenient restaurant or hotel dining room if there was not. Today it was different. The Blairs had their car, and they drove down—rather painfully, for there were bags and suitcases, hatboxes, Toby's typewriter, and a small wheelbarrow for Jojo piled within. Franklin Blair was the sort of man who seats the wives together in the tonneau. He ordered Toby into the front, and all the way to Princeton regaled him with a monologue on business, interspersed with faintly hostile observations to the effect that, "Of course I suppose you writer fellows aren't interested in such things——"

They lunched in the car, in a parking field quite near the stadium, out of delicatessen boxes thoughtfully brought from New York by the Blairs. Then Toby escorted the other three to their stadium gate, and left them. The leave-taking was prolonged; he would not see Franklin and Alice again, as they were going to try to get out of town ahead of the crowd.

"We want to be home for Baby Alice's nine o'clock bottle," the adult Alice smilingly confided. "She's so cute then—isn't she, Daddy? All pink from sleep, like a little roseleaf."

Franklin said she was.

"I'd love to see her," Ann murmured conventionally. Her eyes were on Toby. "Do a good job, won't you, honey? Got plenty of cigarettes?"

"Whole pack."

"You're not going to write in the press box, are you? It'll be too dark——"

Toby shook his head. "Western Union. Better meet me there, right after the game."

When he got there through the roaring twilight three hours later, she was waiting for him, sitting on a bench inside. She was not alone. There was no sign of the Blairs; but a pair of very large collegians, bareheaded, in huge fur coats, flanked her at right and left. One had curly red hair and a joyful pug nose. The other was blond. They extended sizeable shoes at incredible length for people to trip over, and inclined their heads and one shoulder apiece towards Ann. The blond youth held a fur sleeve across the back of the bench, and both young men seemed to know Ann very well indeed and to think her quite the prettiest girl on earth.

Toby had never seen either of them before.

Ann *was* pretty. She was marvellous-looking. There were times when Toby felt it like a blaze in his mind, and this was one of the times. She wore a little brown hat that fitted her head and jutted in points on her cheeks—the "skull cap" hat so very smart that season. Her hands on her hips pushed her fur coat back from a slim tan dress with a brown suede collar. She was laughing, her lashes lowered and her white teeth catching her lip. To be the man to whom she belonged was a proud thing; to approach as such, before these two enchanted college boys, was almost a conceited thing, a swaggering.

He tried to be as inoffensive as possible about it. His "Hullo" was mild. He did not set his typewriter down, but kept it in his hand, to show them that he would be moving on in just a minute.

The two young men had risen as one. Their smiles had

faded, and they were looking almost owlshly grave, standing at attention. Their eyes, direct, unembarrassed, were yet a trifle apprehensive, fixed on him. "It's all right," Toby wanted to say kindly. "There will be no bloodshed."

He suddenly felt utterly grown up, and somewhat heavy.

"This is Bill Salisbury, Toby," Ann was saying from the bench. "A friend of Franklin's. My husband, Toby McLean."

Toby and the blond youth shook hands, with the campus swoop. "How are you?" they asked simultaneously.

"And Mr.—oh, dear——"

"Kohler," supplied the redheaded one. "Awfully glad to meet you, Mr. McLean."

"I read your stuff," he added respectfully. "Enjoy it a lot."

"Thanks," Toby said. "I'm glad of that."

"What did you think of the game?" Ann asked him. "Isn't it great Princeton won?"

"Now you're talking!" approved the blond young man.

Ann smiled demurely, her eyes on Toby's. They both knew that she had wanted Princeton to win simply because, that morning at breakfast, Toby had thought of a splendid lead for his story of the game, which he could not have used if they had lost.

"Yeah," Toby said merely, smiling back. "Suits me."

He must get along, he thought; his typewriter was heavy in his hand. Behind him the street door was opening constantly, letting cold air in and strings of people in and out. In the back of the room the telegraphers were busy to distraction, sending private messages about bets won and lost, about trains, about rendezvous for the evening. Within a few minutes the Number One pages marked Night Press Rate would begin coming up to them from the hot little basement downstairs, where the sports

writers toiled. Toby out of the corner of his eye glimpsed Shorty Ross, always the last man to get to work, hurrying toward the stairs with his battered Corona.

A few more pleasantries, and he would follow. "So you know Franklin, do you?" he said to the blond young man.

It appeared that Franklin was an employee of the blond young man's father. He put this very delicately; but there it was. "I've met him several times," he added. "I see him when I go down there. He's one of the managers, I guess, or something."

"They got off all right, did they?" Toby inquired of Ann.

"Um-hmm. They left in the middle of the third quarter—right in the middle of that touchdown, incidentally. Then Bill and Red, who were sitting near us——"

"Leaped," said the blond youth, "or should I say 'lept,' into the breach."

"You should say 'hurled themselves,'" Red said. "We did. We hurled ourselves."

Bill eyed him coldly. "I lept," he stated. "You hurled, if you like. But my progress was distinctly a lepping—of, I may add, the nimbler sort."

"Anyway!" Ann terminated the solemn absurd discussion. "You got there, and took good care of me——"

"The best," Bill said to Toby. "Really."

"In fact, we were superb," said Red.

"I believe you," Toby grinned. He liked these jaunty madmen,—"especially Red," he told himself. Bill was handsomer, having gray eloquent eyes, a sculptured nose and the crisp light hair that never musses. Women would like Bill better, inevitably. Ann, Toby knew, liked him better. But men would like Red, that urchin grown six feet tall.

"What we want to know now," Red said, "is, whether

on the strength of past performances, we may go yet a little further in care-taking——”

“And escort your incomparable frau to a tea dance,” Bill finished smoothly. “While you’re writing your article,” he supplemented. “We’ll bring her back in half an hour, or whenever you say.”

“As is,” Red promised additionally. “Who touches a hair of yon brown hat, dies like a dog, march on—and all that.”

“Do you mind, honey?” Ann asked.

“Sure!” said Toby heartily. “I mean, of course I don’t mind. That’ll be fine.”

It was arranged that the trio should remain at the tea dance until Toby finished working and joined them; he was given explicit directions for finding the right clubhouse. Both young men thanked him profusely, and Ann kissed a fingertip and wiggled it at him.

“Don’t be long,” she said, “will you.”

He watched them go. On the dusky crowded sidewalk beyond the windows, Bill and Red took hold of Ann’s arms. They began to stride, then almost to run; when last seen they really were running, and Ann’s small feet were lifted off the ground. . . .

A dozen football experts were working downstairs in a room full of foggy yellow light. They sat elbow to elbow at plain board tables set around the walls and in the center of the room. Toby, entering, saw them as so many oblivious backs—each back as familiar to him as the face of its owner. There was Grantland Rice, at work with his coat on; a neat dark back with a blue shirt-collar. Next him, Bill McGeehan with iron-gray hair. That slim, exceedingly straight back whose ramrod spine supported a tall blond head was Westbrook Pegler’s; the

head that was narrow and brown, with the ears in motion, belonged to Damon Runyan, who chewed gum while he worked. With these men and others who were gathered in this room, Toby had written countless stories, witnessed innumerable athletic contests, traveled incalculable miles.

He spied an empty seat in a corner of the room, and was on his way to it when his associate, Bill Hastings, beckoned him.

"Look at Hank," said Hastings succinctly. "Give a look."

He referred to Hank Lehmann, the third of the Star's triumvirate of gridiron correspondents. Lehmann sat at a table in an alcove, his typewriter open before him. He blinked at the keyboard; now and then, after long contemplation, he picked at a key. "Fried," observed Toby, watching him critically. "Why, the weasel's *plastered!* How'd he get like that?"

"How does one?"

"When, I mean. I didn't see him drunk around the press box."

"You're right you didn't," said Hastings. "He never got there."

There were stray sentences on the crooked yellow paper in Lehmann's machine, but none was intelligible. Toby, who had crossed to the alcove to find this out, laid a hand on Lehmann's back. "Nice work, boy," he said gently. "You're doing fine."

He returned to Hastings. "Well. Who's elected?"

"Well," said Hastings, "who is?"

"I am, I guess," Toby agreed sadly. "He's covered me up, plenty. So have you, for that matter."

Hastings did not deny it. "I'd do it," he said, pushing his hat further back on his head. "Only thing is, I'm try-

ing to get through and get home. My wife's having some people in——"

"You take him along when you go, then," Toby said. "And I'll do the story. And watch him, will you? If he ever files what he's got there, it'll be just too bad. Thing reads like Gertrude Stein with delirium tremens."

He missed the tea dance altogether. His own story took him over an hour, and Lehmann's took almost as long. It was seven-thirty when, for the second time that evening, he typed the two long dashes with the little *o* between them that signify the end of a story for the press. The basement room was deserted by this time, save for Pegler and Shorty Ross. Toby lounged wearily to his feet, overturning his chair and letting it lie. He buttoned his vest, rereading the final page "By Hank Lehmann" meanwhile; donned his coat and overcoat, and set his hat on at the careless becoming angle he always affected—slightly over one brow, and a trifle back.

Hank, he decided, could have no complaints in the morning. This story was better than the one he had signed himself.

"Well, so long," he said to Shorty and Pegler. "I'll be seeing you."

"Stick around a minute," Shorty said, typing busily, "I'm about through here." He frowned at his copy, and looked up, his forefingers suspended in V formation over the keys. "Say, what was the name of that substitute——"

"Harrington," Pegler said instantly. "And 'covered himself with glory' is the next line."

Toby was moving away. "Got to go," he explained to Shorty. "I'm supposed to be at some sort of college-boy shindig."

He mounted the stairs, and encountered Ann and Red and Bill at the top.

"Oh, here you are!" Ann cried. "We were just coming down——"

She had obviously had a beautiful time; her eyes were shining, her cheeks brilliant with gaiety and exercise, with swift undergraduate foxtrots done by firelight. She had lost one shoe buckle, and the tips of the toes of both suede shoes bore dim tiny crescents of the corn meal that had made the dance floor slippery. Someone, probably Red, had thrust a bizarre bouquet of six or seven orange Princeton feathers into the buttonhole of her collar. She looked about seventeen years old, "—and," thought Toby with fond paternal amusement, "*very* rah-rah."

"Hullo," he said, beaming down at her. "How's the Sweetheart of Sigma Chi?"

Ann made a little face at him, unseen by Red and Bill, who loitered several paces in the rear. "Toby," she said, "what the dickens happened to you? We waited and waited——" Her eyes became solicitous, searching his face. "Did you get stuck, or what?"

"Well, yes," Toby said. "In a manner of speaking."

Ann exclaimed that it was a shame; he had missed the most gorgeous party. "You're all through now, though, aren't you?" she asked. "Come on, then. There're some people waiting out front—Jimmy somebody and his girl—They've got a car, and they're going to drive us back to New York."

The car was a giant's glossy coffin on wheels, with a Princeton banner blanketing its rear. Jimmy, who reclined under the steering wheel and dangled half a leg over the side, was a smallish baby-faced youth in a derby hat and the ubiquitous coonskins. His last name proved to be Hayes or Haynes. The car belonged to his father,

who had driven to the game, but returned—somewhat to his own surprise—by the railroad.

The girl beside Jimmy was introduced as Miss Randolph; everyone, Ann included, called her Puff. She wore a sleek sport coat of short-haired fur with an extreme, upstanding collar, in which the effect from the back of her tight felt hat was that of a cup inverted in a saucer. She was slender and fair, with dark, bored eyes and the sort of mouth that is made by ignoring the actual mouth entirely, and painting on a vivid petalled pout. Younger even than Ann looked—she could not have been more than sixteen—her lassitude, her bored eyes and thin disdainful eyebrows, her way of murmuring, “How amusing” in a voice that was not amused, made her seem years older. Or rather, as Ann pointed out afterwards, they made her seem “sixteen trying to *seem* years older.”

Said Ann, “There never *was* anyone as old as Puff tries to seem.”

They drove to New York. Ann sat in the back seat between Kohler and Salisbury, who lay so low on the ends of their spines that their heads were level with hers. They were still hatless; Red’s hair was frantic with wind, but Bill’s stayed close and neat, as it would always. A fur robe covered all three, its edge drawn up into their arm-pits. Sometimes they smoked, and the blown sparks made momentary tiny pyrotechnics in the night.

Jimmy and Puff and Toby rode in front. Puff, whose ennui her first long glance at Toby had miraculously dispelled, sat with one silken leg over the other, shapely and a-gleam in the light from the dashboard. The toe of her dangling foot just grazed Toby’s ankle. She was still languid, by no means vivacious; but her dark eyes were not bored now. She sat ever so slightly nearer Toby

than was necessary, and gave him a peerless profile, outlined against fur, to look at.

"Tell me about being a newspaper man," she said. "Is it fun at all?"

She had a murmurous little voice, and she talked in the shelter of her collar; Toby in order to hear her must incline his head towards hers. This lent a confidential, even a secret air, to the most trivial exchange of words; and Toby saw that it infuriated Jimmy. Indeed, the whole turn that events had taken infuriated Jimmy. He drove sulkily, saying almost nothing. Toby's attempts to include him in the conversation failed, and direct questions brought from him only the barest monosyllables.

"You crazy goof," Toby thought helplessly, longing to laugh, "I don't want your girl! Don't be like that."

The occupants of the back seat were singing as they rode, their voices flute-like, sweetly thin in the rushing wind. Songs of the summer just over, and tunes from the new fall shows. Then a whole medley of college songs: "Old Nassau" first, of course, and twice repeated: "Lord Jeffry Amherst," "When the Backs Go Tearing By," and "Bulldog, Bulldog." Then "Old Nassau" again, and the low slow wail of the Princeton Jungle Song.

Presently they were singing things that had been popular three, four, five years ago. "Oh, listen!" one would cry. "Remember:

*"Pic-ture me
Up-on your knee . . ."*

And the others would come in lustily:

*"Just tea for two
And two for tea . . ."*

Toby listened, smiling a little. He could remember "Alexander's Ragtime Band"; he could remember even the verses of "Poor Butterfly" and the other songs that had been new when young lieutenants wearing spurs were asked politely not to wear them on the dance floor. But the musical memories in the seat behind him went no further back, apparently, than "Redhead Gal" and "It Had to Be You," and they were vague as to the middle words of these.

"I am old," said Toby silently to the moon. "I am old and decrepit. I am the hoary Grampa of this outfit."

He was not really depressed, however. To feel older than these youngsters was not necessarily to feel old at all. In a lofty yet sympathetic, perceptive way, he was entertained by the ride. By Bill in the back seat, trying to capture Ann's hand under the robe. By Jimmy, fuming at the wheel. By Puff.

Particularly by Puff.

He knew that, for all her pretended listlessness, Puff's mind was fastened fiercely upon himself. It was impossible not to know that she thought him very handsome, important, romantic and exciting; the fact that he was married quite evidently only added to his glamour in her eyes. As far as Puff was concerned, he and she were alone in the front seat; Jimmy, except as a chauffeur, had ceased to exist. This became more and more painfully obvious. But there seemed to be nothing Toby could do about it.

He said once in a fatherly undertone to Puff, "The motorman is waxing a bit peevish, I'm afraid. Don't you think you ought to smile at him, or something?"

Her reply was so soft-spoken that he had to duck his head and ask her to repeat it. "I said," repeated Puff

silently, "he can go jump up and down . . . May I have another Lucky, please?"

She smoked incessantly. Toby was kept busy lighting cigarettes for her. "You light me one," she would say when he offered the package. When obediently he reached for the dashboard lighter and bent his head, the cigarette between his lips, he was aware of her dark gaze upon him. When he handed her the cigarette her fingers took it slowly from his fingers, as if it clung. She had a way of saying "Thank you" with a sudden provocative sweep of long eyelashes; lifting them on the first lackadaisical syllable, letting them fall on the last.

"And all in all," Toby decided, "she needs a good spanking."

He said, "Listen, Puff, how old are you?"

"I'm twenty."

"Yeah. And," said Toby, "now that we have that settled, how old *are* you?"

"Don't you believe me?"

"Certainly not."

"We-ell. How old do you think I am, then?"

"Sixteen. Maybe."

Puff waived that. "It's a question of experience, isn't it?" she said. "Not how long one has lived, but how *much*."

Toby's mouth quivered slightly. "And you've lived a lot, have you?"

"Quite," said Puff calmly.

This was what they meant, Toby told himself, when they talked about the Younger Generation. This blasé child with the stage mouth and the astounding sex-consciousness, was what all the shooting was about. Immature as she was in her desire to seem mature, her sophisti-

cation was undeniable. "If there's anything she doesn't know," Toby thought, "I'm One-Eyed Connelly."

He speculated about her. Her life would have a rapid staccato rhythm; the tinkle of ice in glasses, the slam of heavy car doors, the midnight cry of saxophones, the pulse of cities, would accent it. And she was sixteen. Perhaps only fifteen . . . He was interested in her as a type, as a phenomenon. He wanted to find out what made her tick. He said, "Tell me more about yourself." And, to start her off, "Where do you live, and all that?"

Puff lived in New York. She attended Miss Fleming's school. "Only as a day pupil, though. I couldn't stay there all the time, of co'se, I'd go ga-ga." She spent her summers in Europe, when she did not spend them on the Sound, and she preferred Europe to the States. "The men as a rule are so much more attractive, don't you think?"

She had been engaged twice, and once, last August, she had almost been married. "But there was some fuss or other about the license, and by the time he'd fixed that I'd changed my mind." She didn't believe in marriage, anyway; she would probably never marry now. She was, it gradually appeared, fed up with a number of things. School. Night clubs. College boys. The slang expression, "And how!" Musical comedies. Charlie Chaplin. The Paris Ritz Bar . . .

"I'm talking an awful lot," she observed at last.

"Don't stop. I'm hanging on every word."

Puff's lashes did their quick little trick again, and Toby smiled faintly, indulgently. Puff had so many little tricks. ("You ought to watch that infant work," he told Ann afterward. "It's a revelation.") Idly now as she went on talking he noticed that her coat had parted at

the hem, and that the wind was curling the brief silk skirt of her dress; Puff seemed not to notice it at all.

With his thumb and forefinger Toby picked up the corner of the coat and dropped it lightly over six inches of silken knee and a ruffled garter buckled with marcasite.

"You're a big girl now, you know," he remarked gently. Adding, "Sorry. I interrupted. You were saying that your father and mother don't understand you——?"

The passengers clamored to dine in Newark, but the chauffeur would not stop—though Puff, addressing him for almost the first time since they left Princeton, did her best to persuade him:

"Please, Jimmy, let's. The Robert Treat is really quite nice, and they dance there——and Mr. McLean's starved! We all had something to eat after the game, but he didn't——"

"I'm all right," Toby said, amused. He had not mentioned hunger.

He was more amused when Puff's elbow immediately nudged him, urging him to conspire with her in what was only too patently a plot to postpone their parting, his and hers. He was also somewhat annoyed. Little fool . . . He said deliberately, "I had coffee and a hot dog while I was working. I'm not hungry at all, as a matter of fact."

"And," he thought, "my dear child, *them're those*."

He didn't know Puff.

On the ferryboat just starting to cross to New York, she suddenly said, "I want to go out on deck."

"Uh-uh," said Toby. "You stay here."

"No, I want to." She was sitting erect, turning toward him. "Move," she insisted, pushing his arm. "Let me get out. I'm being asphyxiated in this place."

"Let her out, Toby," Ann said anxiously from the back seat. "Puff, don't you feel well, honey?"

Puff during the trip had had several deep, calm, unflinching draughts from a flask of corn whisky brought by Red.

"Not very," she answered now.

Toby opened the door beside him, climbed out, and assisted Puff to alight. He looked over at Jimmy, inquiringly. Jimmy was slouched under the wheel, one elbow lodged between spokes. He had not stirred, nor, plainly, did he mean to.

"Better go with her, hadn't you," Toby said.

Jimmy's expression was disinterested, aloof. He mumbled something; Toby thought it was, "Oh, she's all right." . . .

"Want me to go with you?" Ann was asking kindly. But Puff had already moved off. "You go, Toby," Ann directed, settling back.

Puff was making her way along the narrow path between the wall and the motionless cars, moulding her coat about her figure as she went. She was not very tall, but she was taller than Toby would have expected, if he had thought about it; he hadn't consciously, but now he found that her height was a surprise. She should be *petite*; she had the personality of little stature.

Following her, he noted that her long legs were perfectly shaped, that her walk was a lounging stroll, like a mannequin's. "She's no more sick," he abruptly thought, "than I am. Jimmy was right."

They gained the little corner deck, and Puff turned and confronted him. "There!" she said. "Isn't this much better?" She added, "May I have a cigarette?"

"You may not. You're supposed to be ill."

"But I'm not in the least, of course."

Toby eyed her sternly, trying not to smile; it was difficult, she was so self-possessed, so coolly outrageous.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded. "Here we make a bee-line for fresh air——"

"You're not really angry," Puff said. It was a statement. She extended her hand, palm upward. "Lucky, please."

Sighing, Toby produced one. "You're incorrigible," he told her goodhumoredly. "I never saw such a brat."

"I usually get my own way," said Puff, "if that's what you mean."

She took the lighted cigarette and sauntered to the rail; leaned both arms on it, looking into the scudding gilt-black water. Toby leisurely followed and stood beside her. He looked at New York. The billion stars in the piece of sky-slipped-down-to-earth that was New York.

Puff murmured at his elbow.

"Hmm?" Toby said.

He withdrew his gaze from the lights, and fixed it on her. She was still looking at the water. "I just said, I wonder when I'll see you again?"

Toby made the conventional reply. "Soon, I hope."

She scrutinised him sideways. "Do you really?"

"Why, of course."

"You might call me up," Puff said, after a moment. "It's in the phone book, under my father's name. T. Gregory Randolph."

"Oh, is he your father?" Toby asked.

He had never heard of T. Gregory Randolph; but he had to say something.

He too leaned his arms on the rail and hung over them, peering down. He was silent a moment, and Puff was silent.

"Will you?" she said then.

"Will I what?"

"Call me up?"

Her eyes were upon him again. Toby's eyes met them, and he smiled; a friendly smile, designed to take the sting out of his words. "Probably not, no," he said evenly.

Puff thought about that.

"You're so damned *married*," she complained, after a time. "Aren't you?"

"It's not that so much," Toby said. "I'm so damned in love, is the point."

"With your wife, you mean?"

"Naturally."

"Well," said Puff, "lots of people aren't. With their wives, I mean."

"Lots of people aren't married to people like Ann," said Toby.

Puff was thoughtful again.

"How long have you been married?" she asked.

"Two months."

"Oh. Only two months really?"

"Yes," Toby said rather defensively.

Puff looked at the water. "I would get a break like that," she remarked softly.

She let the cigarette fall from her fingers, and watched it disappear. She straightened. "Well," she said, "nevertheless—I'll probably call you. I'll try not to—but I probably will. You can hang up on me if you want to." She looked at him squarely, shamelessly, and smiled a little. "I do those dumb things," she said, "when I'm crazy about somebody. And I'm crazy about you. You might as well know."

CHAPTER NINE

THE bedroom of the McLean's apartment was large, as apartment bedrooms go. The twin beds were not in the way, and one could cross directly, without detours, from door to chiffonier, from chaise longue to dressing table to full-length mirror set in the closet door. It was a pretty room, lit cosily at night by a tall pair of shaded lamps on the dressing table and a single lamp on the stand between the beds. There were lights in the ceiling also, but Ann, who hated a glare, had unscrewed the bulbs in the fixture slightly, so that, click the wall-switch though you would, they did not light.

The windows, of which there were three, were recessed, and hung with glazed chintz curtains, in powder-blue and lavender touched with black. The box that concealed the radiator filled the space under one of the windows, and Ann had had similar boxes built in the two corresponding spaces: small window-seats covered with flat chintz curtains. On one of these seats—the one below the window that never would open—a red-haired doll from Paris sat with her long legs crossed, jauntily smoking a flannel cigarette.

The carpet was dull purple, the lampshades softly gold. The dressing table was a frivolous petticoated one, and numerous little lacey pillows heaped the chaise longue. In effect, the room was much more Ann's than it was Toby's. Except for the military brushes on the top of the chiffonier, the bulldog pipe in the ashtray on the stand, and such occasional transient contributions to the scheme as a

crumpled shirt cast into a chair, or a dress collar hung on a bedpost, or a pair of enormous cordovan shoes on the rug, it seemed all Ann's room, all feminine.

Toby at first had complained of this, albeit quite cheerfully.

"Let's put in a cuspidor," he had said. "Or a shelf of shaving mugs. Just some little touch, to make it a bit more co-ed."

"Don't you like it?" Ann had asked, wide-eyed. "I think it's darling!"

"Sure I like it. As a boudoir for a beauteous baby, it can't be beat. But," said Toby, "what am *I* doing in it? Who's that man seen slinking in and out? No fooling," he added, "I feel immoral in it. Every time I start to go out in the hall, I feel as if I ought to look both ways. . . ."

Ann thought that that was a very good thing indeed.

"*Keep* feeling like that!" she enjoined him, smiling.

This room was the scene of their first conversation about Puff Randolph; they had been back home, alone, for a quarter of an hour. Though it was only eleven o'clock, Ann had already retired, pleading utter exhaustion. In a pale yellow negligée trimmed with yellow ostrich feathers that caressed her throat and trembled against the backs of her hands, she sat propped up in the corner twin bed, against her pillow and Toby's borrowed one. A book she meant to read until she grew sleepy lay on the quilt in her lap, unopened as yet.

Beside her, on the little table, the golden lamp beamed over a green-painted thermos jug, a lavender cloisenné clock, a notebook and pencil, cigarettes, a ball of lace handkerchief, and the several other books they were currently reading: "The Sun Also Rises," plays by Eugene O'Neill, volume one of "An American Tragedy," Pierre Louys' "Aphrodite," and The Best News Stories of the year

before,—hugged together by a wedding-present pair of silver bookends.

Toby intended to work. He was fully dressed save for coat and cravat, and he would not sit down; while he smoked and talked to Ann about Puff, he prowled the room restlessly, as if he might at any moment bolt for the door, and away.

“On the story?” Ann had asked, when he announced his intention of working.

This meant “Cabaret Lady.” Ann asked about it with increasing frequency these days, in a tone a shade reproachful, faintly goading. While daily he watched the mails at the office for the chosen magazine’s verdict on the manuscript, Toby continued to allow her to think that it still was not more than half finished. It even perversely pleased him to have her think so, to feel the faint barb in her tone. She would be apologetic, and doubly proud and happy, when she knew.

“Yeah,” he said now. “On the story.”

Ann regarded him thoughtfully.

“What brought this on?” she wondered aloud after a minute. “You haven’t touched it for days, have you? And here, on a Saturday night, when you’re dead tired——”

“I’m not tired,” Toby said quickly. He was; but he wanted to forget it. “I had an idea,” he explained equivocally. “Just came to me, riding back. I think I know how I can wash it up.”

He had had an idea; that much of what he said was true. He would write a character study of Puff Randolph. He would call it “Portrait of a Gilded Child,” and he would write *now*: tonight! His mind was full of it. His mind had thought it all out while his voice interrogated his subject, while his reporter’s eyes and ears gathered her

in completely, all the way from Princeton to New York. "Portrait of a Gilded Child:" a satirical thing, a sensational thing; a knockout!

But he would not tell Ann. Not till afterward. . . .

Contemplating what he meant to do, he had begun this pacing; back and forth, and over, and around. His voice going with him, strings of cigarette smoke trailing him, lassoing him, when he turned. Impatient though he was to get to work, he was glad to be detained for these few minutes by talk of Puff. To quote her for Ann's benefit, to hear himself describe and comment and narrate aloud, helped to crystallize the stream of his inspiration.

"So then she said she'd often contemplated suicide, and I said, '*Why*, for heaven's sake?' and she said, 'Well, why not? Living doesn't intrigue me particularly. Does it you, really? It's only worth while for its Moments, and those are pretty scarce, it seems to me'——"

He repeated the entire grotesque conversation.

"And of course," said Ann equably at the end, "*you're* one of her Moments. That was perfectly obvious."

Toby grunted.

"Didn't she tell you that too?"

"Oh, she babbled something. When we were out on deck.

"She's just a kid," he added, more to show Ann that he had not been flattered than in extenuation of Puff.

He was near the chaise longue, and he sat down now on the foot of it to light a cigarette from the short hot stub of the one he had almost consumed. He could feel Ann's eyes, and they embarrassed him a little, though he realized that this was silly. They were amused eyes, and to their amusement he retorted abruptly, grinning, "Well? I wasn't the only cradle-robber abroad this evening—was I?"

"By no means!"

"Though," said Toby on second thought, "I suppose Bill's as old as you are, at that. He must be twenty-two or twenty-three."

"Twenty-two. But puerile. He's cute," Ann supplemented, "don't you think?"

"Nice fellow, yeah."

This brief exchange had the effect of an aside; they were both primarily interested in Puff, and would return to her.

"You certainly knocked him for a row of tall red totem poles," Toby observed in passing, "if I ever saw it done."

"But I wasn't a Moment," Ann smiled. "I was only a Fraction of a Second, relatively . . . Go on about Puff," she urged, settling back in her pillows. "What did she say exactly? Out on deck, I mean."

"Oh, something about telephoning."

This was as much of what Puff had said as his fear of sounding vain would allow him to repeat. A quotation, or even the barest mention, of her forthright, "I'm crazy about you," was entirely beyond him.

"She's going to telephone you, you mean?"

"So she said. She won't, of course."

"Certainly she will!" Ann contradicted, with conviction but without malice. "I'd bet on that. Well, and then what did you say?"

"Told her not to be a nougat. I became fatherly," Toby reported gravely. "I said, among other things, that I was tempted to turn her over my knee and spank her."

"To which," he concluded, looking pained, "Little Bright-eyes replied, 'Sadist!'"

He emitted a sound between mirth and a snort. "Can you defeat it?" he inquired, wagging his head.

"I can't, no."

Toby sat a minute longer, musing; then he said, "Well——" and, stretching mightily, lounged to his feet. "I'll tuck you in, and leave you to——" He peered at Ann's book. "What is it, 'American Tragedy?' "

"Volume two."

"She drowned yet?" Toby inquired idly.

He stood at the foot of Ann's bed, rolling up a shirt-sleeve on a sunburned, powerful-looking arm. In this moment, as often, it was absurd that he tapped little typewriter keys. That arm could take a typewriter and, winding up as a pitcher does, throw it (you felt sure) a block or more. . . .

Ann was preoccupied. Her gaze was fixed on the miniature hillock half way down the quilt that was made by her feet. She ignored Toby's question, seemed momentarily to have forgotten his presence; stared at the tiny hump with narrowed eyes.

"You know what I think I'll do, Toby?" she said at last.

She sat erect, and her eyes, wide now, and pleased, and confident of his pleasure, sought Toby's eyes. "I think I'll do a story about Puff! A magazine story. Wouldn't you?" Ann queried, in the voice that seems to add, "If you were I?"

Toby looked at her.

"Because," Ann went on, "she's simply priceless copy, Toby! Complete and ready-made, and perfect. All I'd have to do would be to *write* her—as is—and the rest of the story would come. Or," said Ann, thinking aloud, "I wouldn't need any rest of it. Puff *is* the story, don't you see? Her character's the whole thing!"

"I see," said Toby slowly.

"Yes," he said.

He couldn't tell her that he wanted to do it, that he had

it (as it seemed to him now) as good as done. She wanted too much to do it herself. She was too jubilant about it. Under the quilt her feet bobbed like an excited child's; she hugged herself with both arms. "Ooh!" she said. "I think that'll be *great*!" She appealed to Toby. "Don't you?"

Toby nodded. "You bet."

He cleared his throat, and tried again. "I should say it will!"

One of his sleeves was rolled as high as it would go; the other remained fastened at the cuff. Absently he curved his hands on the smooth round ridge of the footboard, and slid them apart, together, apart, together. The hands were warm, and they made a squeaking noise on the polished wood. "You're darn right," he said, his eyes lowered. "It'll be a knockout."

He thought with grim humor, "And I could cry a little." . . .

He let his hands fall, and put them in his pockets. He looked toward Ann. She might just say, "Don't *you* want to write it, Toby? Oh, listen, honey; *you* write it!" She might just say that, just remember to that extent that he wrote. Then he could say in return, "Oh, no, you're the one to do it, Ann,"——and that, somehow would make him feel better. He would feel generous; he felt merely cheated now.

Ann was reaching for the notebook and pencil she always kept on the bedside table for the jotting down of ideas born at night. "Go away!" she ordered gaily. "Go ahead out and work. I won't miss you at all!"

She ruffled through the scribbled pages and opened the notebook at the first blank one, bending the covers backward to make them stay. Toby watched her spread the little book upon "An American Tragedy" against her knee, and take up her pencil.

"I guess I won't try to work tonight, after all," he said.

Ann raised expressionless eyes to his face. After an instant she nodded slightly, as if to say, "I expected that."

"I'm pretty tired——"

Ann said nothing.

"I think I'll have a highball and go to bed."

He was rolling his shirt-sleeve down to his wrist again: symbolic gesture, though he made it automatically, unaware.

"What are you going to call it?" he asked suddenly. "Do you know?"

"I haven't thought about a title yet."

Toby said, "Why don't you call it 'Portrait of a Gilded Child', or something."

So Ann called it "Portrait of a Gilded Child."

She began it the following day, and finished it in a week . . . and sold it two weeks later, for three hundred dollars.

By that time, several other things had happened:

§

"McLean! Hey, Toby!"

"Whadda you want?" he yelled, above the noise of typewriters, of footsteps, of voices talking into telephones. This was the sports department of the Star. It was not a room, but a corner of the immense chaotic place called the city room; only a courtesy railing separated the sports writers' desks from the rows upon rows of desks of the staff reporters and rewrite men. Consequently there was always noise, clatter, chatter; a fiendish din, which no one who belonged there even noticed.

Toby finished the line he was writing, hit the period key, thumbed the space bar twice, and lifted his head. Several

yards away Hank Lehmann was standing, holding a telephone and its receiver out to him.

"Who is it?" said Toby, rising.

"Dame."

"Not the bride?"

"I don't think so, no."

Toby was given pause. "Ask who it is."

Hank asked. Listened a minute. He lowered the transmitter and put his palm over it. "Miss Randolph."

Toby nodded. "I just stepped out," he said, and returned to his typewriter.

This was on the Tuesday after Princeton.

On Friday, reaching the office in the late afternoon with a story about a quarterback's sprained ankle to be written, he found a note on his desk. "Toby: Call Massilon 6364 as soon as you come in." No name was given, and Hastings, who had scrawled the note, was gone. Toby took the precaution of looking up Puff's father's name in the telephone directory. The number was Massilon 6364.

"And you didn't call it?" Ann asked later, when he told her.

"No."

"Oh, why not," Ann said compassionately. "The poor kid—I think you're mean."

"But I haven't got anything to say to her," Toby protested. "What would I *say*?—except 'How are you' and 'How's your sex life,' and 'Oh, it is, is it?'—and the various 'wells' that lead up to the goodbye? What would be the *point*?" he demanded of Ann.

"Just to be nice——"

"Hell," said Toby, "I haven't time."

Nevertheless, two or three days later, when someone shouted to him in the office that there was "a sultry soprano" on the wire, he answered at once; and when the

voice so described proved not to belong to Puff, he was rather more disappointed than otherwise.

He attributed this to the fact that any voice at all would have been more welcome than the one which now assailed his ear, saying, "This is Peaches Davis. Say, I guess you think you're smart, don't you?" Miss Davis was one of the chorus-girl cheerleaders who—in diaphanous pleated white skirts, clinging white jersey sweaters lettered in red, red hair-ribbons, pearl earrings, and more rouge than the occasion really demanded—led cheers for Harold 'Red' Grange and his team of professional football players at the Yankee Stadium these chilly Sundays. She wanted to know what Toby meant by making fun of her in his yesterday's story. Oh yes he did too! Well he certainly did! All her friends were just as sore as they could be. . . .

And so on.

Puff would have been by far the lesser evil.

Several more days went by, and Puff did not call, and Toby thought, "Good. So the idea penetrated!" He thought he was relieved; but he was not particularly so. On the way up in the elevator to the city room every afternoon, he found himself wondering if he would find that she had called. When he didn't, he felt neither glad nor sorry. He felt nothing. But he always wondered.

Once or twice he thought, "That *was* rude, at that. Unnecessary roughness. It wouldn't have hurt me just to say hello". . . .

Meanwhile, he had weightier matters on his mind; chief among them, a growing despondency about himself and a deepening concern regarding his future. This was new to him; and Ann was the cause of it. More specifically, her little triumphs constituted the cause. Her checks from

Picturesque, for example; two of them in November. The editor's enthusiastic comments. An advance copy of next month's issue of the magazine, in which the forthcoming series of 'Impressions' was proudly announced, and Ann was introduced by means of her picture and a write-up, in a box on the table-of-contents page. A letter from the editor of a rival movie magazine: "Dear Miss Vaughn; Won't you let us see some of your work?"

Fan mail came to Ann. People who read the Chronicle-Press were always writing her, saying they liked her column. "I turn to it the minute I open the paper." . . . That sort of thing. Her reviews of photoplays had a definite and recognised box-office value. Excerpts were quoted often in advertisements, on programs, on posters pasted to bulletin boards in the lobbies of theatres. "The best war picture since 'Hearts of the World.'—Ann Vaughn in the Chronicle-Press." Toby passed that particular lobby poster every day. Ann's name was in black type six inches high.

"Her name *means* something," he always thought.

And it would mean more. Inevitably. Nothing was going to stop Ann, nor divert nor impede her. He knew her well enough to be as sure of that as one can be of anything in life. She would graduate to the magazines; she was beginning now. She would promote herself from columns to articles to fiction. This was her ambition, and she would realise it. She was Ann. She was like that.

And Toby?

He didn't know. He was not at all sure about Toby. Not any more. His lifelong faith in himself, in his potentialities, was not so easy to justify as he had thought it would be. Always he had believed that when the time came, when he was ready, he would do swift, tremendous, spectacular things. Now the time had come. He was

ready now, he was almost desperately eager; and he didn't seem to do anything at all.

The fuse of the skyrocket, lit, only fizzled and sputtered. It might still go——

Or it might go out.

He was afraid; and his panic gave him perception, so that he saw himself clearly. Toby McLean, male, white, twenty-six: a sports writer. Not even a very good sports writer. Just a reporter who told you who won the game and how many attended. . . . If you cared about the teams or the sport, you would read him, to find out these things. But you wouldn't read him because he was Toby McLean, because he was *good*. He wasn't anywhere near as good as all that.

Then (Toby asked himself) where had he got the notion that he was going to be great, some one of these days? How had he thought it? By what miracle had he expected the indifferent reporter of athletic contests to be transformed into a literary genius? He could not remember now. Try as he would, he could not recapture—except momentarily—the old illogical bright optimism.

And it didn't help to look about him and see, with this new sharp insight, that the illusion he had cherished about himself was a common one; that most of The Boys believed they were merely marking time, writing ball games, until the day when they would achieve big things. They even believed, as he had used to believe, that that day was tomorrow; and they went on believing it, blindly, year after year. . . .

Take Shorty, for instance:

Late one afternoon toward the end of November, he and Shorty met by chance in the Hotel Astor lobby. Shorty was on his way out. "If you're looking for Pyle," he said, "he's gone for the day. I was just up there."

"Where you bound now?"

"Nowhere."

It appeared that neither of them had anything to do till seven o'clock. It was five now. They left the Astor together and proceeded to a speakeasy, where they drank a whisky apiece standing up at the bar.

"Have another," said Shorty.

Toby nodded. "All right. But let's park, will you? I'm tired."

They ordered, and moved into the room adjoining. A small room, like an alcove, without windows. One wall was chiefly doorway hung with lank rep curtains between which light from the barroom fell inside a little way. Against the other three walls, narrow tables, four to a wall, stood clasped between chairs. Each table had a red checked table cloth, a match-box on end in an ashtray, a shaded short lamp that illumined shoulders and throats and the tips of chins and then, becoming discreet, stared down at the cigarette burns in the red checked cloth. . . .

This particular liquor emporium was situated in the basement of an office building built above the subway; you reached it via the subway stairs, descending them to the turn, where there was a closed door set in the wall. Subway-riders by the thousands passed this portal every day, and thought, if they noticed it at all, that there were tools inside, or brushes and brooms to sweep the steps, or perhaps a subway official, counting nickels. Had one such passerby tried the door, he would have found it bolted; and unless he were known to the one-armed youth who sold shoelaces hard by, it would have remained as shut as the door of a tomb.

The proprietor, Luigi, had brought the battered mechanical piano from his previous establishment and set it up in this one; but he did not allow you to play it, lest

the music proclaim him to the world. He had, in fact, plugged the coin slot—at a remote subterranean point, so that you did not discover until after your coin had disappeared that the slot was plugged and the instrument made mute. Luigi was always very apologetic about this; he always offered to reimburse you,—so promptly and so graciously that you couldn't think of letting him. Wherefore Shorty, during an earlier visit, had been moved to scratch a legend on the face of the piano with the prongs of a fork. It was still there. "Bank of Italy," it said.

The back room was empty today, save for a man and a dark-eyed girl at a corner table. Toby and Shorty took the opposite corner. Shorty kept his overcoat on. Toby stowed his on a neighboring chair, together with their two felt hats, a string of a muffler belonging to Shorty, and a large square envelope marked "Offices of C. C. Pyle," containing photographs of Suzanne Lenglen in action.

"Look 'em over," Shorty urged. "We're going to use 'em in roto a week from Sunday."

Toby said succinctly that he guessed he would wait till then.

Their drinks were slow in coming. They talked desultorily, sitting at ease. Shorty had hitched his chair around so it tilted back against the wall. With one hand he plucked matches from the box in the ash receiver and broke them between thumb and fingers. Toby watched moodily. He sat leaning his arms on the table, hunching his shoulders; feeling the knot of his necktie close under his chin.

You could hear the subway. When a train went by it filled your ears like surf, and you could see the little lamp and the fringe of the table cloth vibrate. . . .

"How's Ann these days?" Shorty asked.

"She's fine."

"I haven't seen her lately."

"She's been working awfully hard," Toby explained.

He frowned suddenly. Eyed the table cloth. There was a liquor stain on it, shaped like Cape Cod on a map.

"Say!" Shorty was saying in a reminded tone. "I hear she did a swell thing—"Portrait of a Glittering Child'——"

"'Gilded Child.'"

"Eunice was telling me yesterday," Shorty went on. "She read it. She said it was immense."

Toby nodded slowly. "It is," he said.

He traced Cape Cod with a broken bit of match that was lying near. "Absolutely," he said. "It's the best thing she's done."

"Magazine thing, hmm?"

"Yes."

"Has she sold it yet?"

"She only finished it Sunday. She'll sell it all right," Toby said. "There's no doubt about that. It's sure-fire."

"It was a damn good idea she had," Shorty commented musingly.

Toby said nothing.

He dropped the bit of match into the tray and cupped his hands on his elbows again. Presently, abruptly, he raised his head and glowered in the direction of the doorway. "Where're those drinks?"——

"Hey, Luigi!" he bawled.

"Yes, Meest' McLean! Queek, now."

"Well, make it *queeker*, will you?"

He subsided, and lit a cigarette.

Shorty went on talking. About Ann. He had, he said, been meaning to call her up and tell her that he thought her story on Valentino's funeral was "the best damn newspaper story I ever *read*!" Ann was one of Shorty's enthu-

siasms; as he spoke, his funny ugly lovable face in the lamplight wore a look that was a tribute, fond, admiring—a little awed. “Say,” he said, “I think she’s—*God*, she’s wonderful! If I could write like that——”

Toby nodded sober agreement. “You said it.”

He felt that he was seeming not to relish the conversation, so he gave it an impetus now, abruptly, to prove to himself and to Shorty that he did not want the subject changed. “You ought to see the thing she started a couple of days ago,” he said. “Another magazine thing—a sort of sketch, or what would you call it——”

He described it: a scene in a Hollywood studio on the day of the first appearance there of a cinema queen imported from Sweden. “She’s got about a thousand words on it,” Toby said in conclusion. “And sa-ay!”

“Good, is it.”

“Is it!”

He liked himself better, after that.

Their drinks arrived on a painted tin tray that advertised a remedy for headaches. In meditative silence they sampled them. The thought that this was his second drink, if it crossed Toby’s mind at all, did not trouble him. He was taking two nowadays, or three, or four. With his new mood, the one-drink limit had been abandoned—unofficially; Ann didn’t know about it yet; but definitely.

He didn’t know himself how definitely.

“What about you?” Shorty asked. He set his glass down, and shook a cigarette out of a package. “Are you writing anything now, outside of assignments?”

“No.”

“I thought you were.”

“I was, but—I’m not now.”

“Neither am I,” said Shorty, who never had.

He said it—the preposterous pitiful thing—quite

gravely; and gravely, after an instant, he added, "But I'm going to do some articles, just as soon as sports quiet down."

Toby glanced at him; glanced away. "Are you?" he said very gently.

Shorty nodded. "Yeah. Didn't I tell you?" he asked. "Americana wants me to do 'em a series."

Americana was a magazine, and an important one. You could have guessed that from Shorty's tone, if you had not known it. He continued: "They want at least six—on different amateur athletes who've gone professional——"

He gave details.

"Umm," Toby said. "I remember now. You did tell me."

He remembered well. Shorty had told him last winter in Florida. He remembered that they had been on the hot bright beach in their bathing suits, with the keys to their bathhouse lockers attached to elastic cords on their wrists. He remembered that it was afternoon, that the water was crinkling turquoise, that the backs of Shorty's freckled shoulders were blistered with previous afternoon suns, that a girl in black and white and scarlet silken beach pajamas sat a little way off, drying a mop of gay gold hair. Shorty had said, "When we get back to New York, I'm going to do some articles. Americana wants me to do 'em a series of six at least——"

He had given details. The same details. Even the words he used had been almost the same. "I was talking to this fellow French, he's one of the associate editors——"

Poor Shorty. It was all just as fresh in his mind, it was just as new a development now, as it had been then, when it really was new. He didn't realise that that had been ten months ago. "Maybe," Toby thought, "French

has been after him again lately." But no. The propositions were identical, they were one.

Shorty was still speaking. "I've been busy as a bird dog," he said, "up to now. You know how it is. But as soon as football's over there won't be much on the calendar. December, and January——"

Toby thought, "And next year, and the year after——"

They were all alike. Shorty, Bill Hastings, Chris Hanley, the whole outfit. There was that novel about a fighter Bill was always going to write. Toby had heard the plot outlined a dozen times. He had approved the title: "Yellow Kid." It hadn't occurred to him before that Bill would never write it; but now he knew. Bill never would. Joe Blake wouldn't write those sports stories for boys he talked about so often and so convincingly. Chris wouldn't write that newspaper play. When Shorty left for St. Petersburg with the Yanks in February, he wouldn't have written those articles. "I've been busy as a bird dog, up to now," Shorty would say.

They were all alike. There was something about the life they led, the playboy schedule they followed, that made chronic procrastinators of all but the few. They were glib men, and each believed his glibness was ability, his trick a talent; this was to be demonstrated—but not today. Ball game today. Fight tonight. What's the hurry, anyhow? *Mañana*.

Listening to Shorty, he thought deeply on these things. But he did not speak a word of them. He couldn't be cruel. He could no more force this new bitter wisdom upon Shorty, than you could tell a little boy there wasn't any Santa Claus. . . .

He said instead, "Sure. You'll have time enough, in December and January."

He said warmly, "Americana, eh? Say, Shorty, that's fine!"——

CHAPTER TEN

NOT far from the apartment, a florist had a little shop that Toby found it difficult to pass on his way home. Headed the other way, he never noticed it at all. But when he was homeward bound the pink bright steamy window stopped him. He had to gaze in and see if there was anything Ann should have. There often was; and when there was, he bought a dozen of it, or a corsage of it, as the case might be.

Ann's attitude about this always secretly delighted him. She tried to be severe with him—meanwhile rapturously smelling the flowers. "But Toby, you musn't—Mmmmm! Gorgeous!" She alternately scolded him for his extravagance, and murmured softly, happily, that she was the only wife she knew who wore orchids. In the end, she always extracted from him a solemn vow to the effect that he would not buy any more flowers "until we're out of debt . . . Unless, of course, it's an anniversary."

"This is an anniversary," Toby would say, a few days later. "Don't you know what day this is? This is *November twenty-second!*" He would intone oratorically: "On November twenty-second, eighteen-ninety-eight, Tom Sharkey won on a foul from Jim Corbett in the ninth round of a match held in New York City— Here, baby. Just a little memento."

At half past five of an afternoon a day or two after his talk with Shorty, he stopped in at the office for the purpose of transferring the facts about a cross country race at Van Cortlandt Park from the back of an envelope

to two sheets of gray copy paper. This would not take long; and he almost didn't telephone Ann, who, according to somebody, had been trying to reach him. He would be with her in less than an hour.

Then he reflected that she might want him to meet her somewhere, or do some errand. Better see, anyway.

Perched on the corner of a desk, holding a telephone and awaiting Ann's answer, he looked very cheerful; and he was. Life was brighter today. Things were picking up—"maybe," his mind was careful to add. Today, before he left the office for the race, he had heard it rumored that Tip Ferguson, sports columnist for the paper, was going to quit. If this was true, either Hastings or McLean would write the column. They were next in line. Hastings, then McLean. "But you'll get it," Toby's informant had prognosticated. "Hastings is fine on baseball and fights, but for general all-'round knowledge of sports you've got it over him like a tent." . . .

"Hello?" said Ann.

"Hello?" He disguised his voice. "Is this Mrs. McLean?"

"Yes."

"This is the Throbbing Heart Matrimonial Bureau," Toby said smoothly. "We understand, madam, that you have made a bad buy from one of our competitors, and it occurred to us that there might be something we could do, in the way of a trade deal——"

"Idiot!" Ann chuckled softly.

It appeared that what she had wished to tell him was nothing pressingly important; it was just that Bill Salisbury had called up from Princeton, and asked them to dinner. "He called about two o'clock and said he was coming to town tonight and wouldn't we dine with him

and go to the 'Scandals,' if he could get tickets? And I said we'd love to.

"That was all right, wasn't it?" Ann asked in conclusion.

"That was just dandy," Toby said jovially. "But what's this word 'we'?"

"It's a pronoun, meaning 'both of us.'"

"Wrong pronoun."

"He *said* both of us——"

"Yeah. But you know what he *hoped*!"

Ann replied that she didn't care anything about that.

"I won't go if you don't."

"Why not?"

"I'd be bored to tears, with just him."

"On the other hand," said Toby, "if I do tag along—like a dowager momma in pants—I'll be bored. And so will Bill. So it's two against one."

They decided, laughing a little, to talk it over when Toby got home. "How soon are you coming?" Ann inquired. "Bill said he'd be here at seven. And we're going to dress."

"Six-thirty," Toby promised, "at the outside."

At six-twenty-five, in the florist's not far from the apartment, he bought three orchids: one more orchid than he had ever bought before at one time. These were purple orchids, large and perfect. They were to have a certain special kind of fern, described by Toby with an illustrative waggle of large fingers as "that spotty-looking stuff—you know what I mean." They were to be tied with a silver (not a lavender) ribbon bow, and the ribbon (not that tinfoil, none of that) must sheathe the stems. He was very particular; and his fussiness amused him. The purchase of this super-corsage—for Ann to wear for some-

body else—amused him. “Gesture,” he thought, smiling at himself.

He had made up his mind that he would under no circumstances be persuaded to intrude upon Bill Salisbury’s little party. “Young Bill,” he called him benevolently, in announcing this ultimatum to Ann when he reached home. “If I go,” he explained, “it’ll just be dinner and theatre in the lad’s life. But if I don’t, it’ll be Romance.”

“Fff!” said Ann.

She said, “I want you to come with us. What difference does it make whether he does or not? Don’t be silly, darling.”

She said finally, “Well——. But what will you do with yourself all evening?”

Toby hadn’t considered this. He did now, briefly. “I might work,” he hazarded, knowing he wouldn’t. He felt like seeing somebody, going somewhere. He grinned at Ann and said, as an experiment, “Or I might get a date of my own——”

Ann nodded quickly. “Yes. Why don’t you?”

Her sanction of the idea was so immediate, her approval so genuine, that Toby chuckled outright. “No,” he said then, shaking his head. “If it isn’t going to bother you any more than *that*——!”

“Sorry!” Ann apologised, dimpling.

They were in the bedroom, and she was getting dressed. This was a thing she did prettily, picturesquely. Toby had never yet beheld the unbecoming stages of her toilette; if Ann could help it, he never would. In the spacious blue-and-white bathroom across the little hall there was an auxiliary dressing table of white enamel, with a towel on top; plain, business-like—heavily laden with bottles and tins and jars. Here, with the door closed, the soapy stage and the cold cream stage were gone through, and the first

light layer of face powder applied, and the bits of pastel Georgette crêpe put on. Ann would either smooth her hair, or ruffle it charmingly; in high-heeled mules and a soft immaculate negligée, caught tight at the hips, allowed to slip from fragrant ivory shoulders crossed with ribbons, she would emerge . . . and Toby would marvel, thinking, "She's *always* pretty! Even when she isn't fixed up at all."

He was thinking this now, for the hundredth time, watching her. He sat on one of the little window-seats, his elbows on his knees, a cigarette in his fingers, watching. There were numerous Anns. There was the back of her sleek small head. There were all the lovely angles of her face, in the triple mirrors of the dressing table. She held a hand glass in one hand, and a lipstick in the other; and the tip of the little finger of the hand that held the lipstick was rosy with salve smoothed on, rubbed in, removed, rubbed on again. . . .

Toby thought of Bill Salibury; Bill's gay gray flattering eyes. "Look here," he said suddenly, "don't get *too* beautiful—" Half in jest, half in earnest.

He thought of the orchids. He had left the box on a chair in the studio as he passed through. A little later, when Ann was dressed (but before Bill came) he would mention them, casually. "Oh, by the way——"

Ann's chosen dinner dress of palest pink tulle was lying across one of the beds. That was all right, he decided. They'd look fine with that.

Ann asked what sort of a day he had had, and he gave her a resumé of it, omitting the only news that really mattered. It wasn't news yet; it wasn't even a probability, but only a possibility. No use getting her all excited. "That's all," he said. "What kind of a day did you have? Listen," he added, quickening, "what about Holly-

wood? Did Williams say anything more about it today—or had he slept it off?”

“He certainly hadn’t! I spent an hour in his office, talking about it.”

“Well, are they going to send you? Is it settled?”

“Practically.”

“*When?*” Toby demanded.

Ann smiled fond reassurance at his anxious-eyed reflection in the mirror. “February. February and March, while you’re down south. If I go, I’ll go when you do, and get back about the same time. You didn’t think,” Ann asked, “I’d go any other time?”

“If they wanted you to——”

Ann turned clear ’round. “And *leave you*—when you’ve got to leave later on?” She shook her head emphatically. “I guess not!”

“As a matter of fact,” she told him, turning back, “they did want me to. Williams was all for having me go right *now*. You know how he always is. But I managed to think up some excellent reasons why later would be a lot better. I had to,” Ann finished simply. “I couldn’t go now, Toby. I mean—six weeks apart is going to be plenty long enough!”

“God, isn’t it,” Toby said gloomily.

He was accustomed to the prospect of the protracted separation. It was inevitable. They had faced it from the very beginning. When the time came, he must spend six weeks in Florida, writing baseball; there was nothing in Florida for a movie columnist to write. Whether Ann remained in New York in his absence, or went to the Coast for her paper, was immaterial. She could not be with him, in any case. This was familiar reasoning, and his mind was used to it—but not resigned to it. The thought

could make him miserable. It made him miserable, momentarily, now. Six—weeks!

“*Damn* such a business, anyway!” he exploded. “Shipped around all over the map—spend half your life in a lower berth—and God’s a room-clerk! Home a little while in the fall, and that’s all you get! Like a damn traveling salesman——For heaven’s sake,” he demanded of Ann, “why couldn’t we be something *stationary*? A bookkeeper and a stenographer. Or a doorman and a cloakroom girl——”

“Or a barber and a manicurist,” Ann smiled. “Or a couple of hairdressers.”

“Or chiropodists! Boss and assistant!”

“That would be awfully nice,” said Ann. “We could talk shop in the evenings!”

“Exactly!”

Toby too was smiling now, cheerful again.

“Go mix a cocktail, will you?” Ann said. “It’s ten to seven.”

It was while he was in the kitchen, squeezing oranges and lemons, whistling under his breath the tune he had put on the graphophone, and thinking pleasant thoughts anent the very small Japanese in the starched white coat to whom he would some day say carelessly, “Cocktails, Oto,” and there would be cocktails—— It was then that he suddenly discovered what he was going to do this evening. He was going to call Puff Randolph and take her to dinner. Of course. In an obscure recess of his mind, this obvious plan had been formed all along. Puff fitted this evening’s mood, she completed the picture.

Drying his hands on a dishtowel, Toby strolled through the studio to shut the victrola off and reverse the record. He called to Ann: “Say, I think I’ll give the Gilded Child a buzz, see what she’s doing.”

"You mean Puff?"

Toby smiled slightly. "It's a wise authoress who knows her own protagonist——"

Ann's voice came again from the bedroom. "Do!" she encouraged him. "I think that would be fun—and she'll be *thrilled!*——"

Massilon 6364 (funny, his remembering that, was busy the first time. Before he could try it again, the downstairs doorbell rang, the button had to be clicked and clicked, the orchids had to be presented to Ann—so hurriedly that all she could say was, "*Darling!*—and young Mr. William Salisbury, of Princeton and looking it, had to be admitted, greeted, seated, given refreshment, given a cigarette and a match, and put at ease.

All this took time. Besides, the telephone was in the studio; and telephoning before an audience of two was hard. An audience of one could eavesdrop peacefully and frankly, and a group could drown your conversation out. But two could do neither, and that was annoying for everybody concerned. Despite Ann, who kept saying, "Aren't you going to try her again, honey? Well, try her now, why don't you? Before it's too late"—he did not call Puff's number a second time until half an hour later. Until he had enjoined Ann and Salisbury to be good children, and seen their festive backs, one little and silver, one big and black, start down the stairs.

"It probably is too late, at that," he thought, "by now. Oh, well."

But it wasn't too late.

"I'm fainting," Puff murmured.

Toby seized the transmitter, which had lain on his knees while he waited. "Hello, Puff!"

"Hello, you."

"You're what, did you say? I didn't quite get it.

"Fainting. Swooning away. *Is it you, really?*" Puff queried. "They said 'Mr. McLean'—but I didn't believe it." Her casual bantering tone had an undertone of excitement, of breathlessness. She laughed, without reason, almost without sound. "Well! How *are* you?"

"Feeling no pain! How're you?"

"Just grand."

"I got your message, that day," Toby said, "and I tried to call you back a couple of times, but you weren't in."

"Oh, did you?"

"Of course."

"I'm glad," said Puff.

She said, when interrogated, that she did have something on for this evening, yes; but she said so tentatively, and added, "Why?"

Toby explained. "Ann's gone places with a Flaming Youth—none other than Bill Salisbury, in fact—and I'm at large. I thought maybe you'd have dinner with me—"

"Well, I will," said Puff, even more promptly than he had expected.

"But what about your date?"

"I can fix him."

"Well, but—I mean, it's sort of tough, at this hour—"

"He's used to it," Puff said calmly.

There was a short debate on the subject of a meeting place. It appeared that Puff was in evening clothes, and Toby said, "Right. I'll dress, and be up there in—half an hour?"

"Uh-uh," Puff demurred. "Not here. If you come here, you'll have to meet Mother. And that's a nuisance. I mean, I'll have to explain you, giving date of birth and so on—I'd better come there," she concluded. "I'll come there."

"Oh, you don't want to do that, do you?"

"Why don't I?"

"We-ell," said Toby, not very seriously, "in my day, ladies didn't call for their escorts."

"But this is *my* day," said Puff. "I'll be right down."

§

She gave him twenty-six minutes.

In this rather inadequate interval, full of alarms and startled hearkenings to the doorbells of apartments across the court, he shaved, had a shower, got partly dressed, dropped the inevitable hopping collar button, sought it with profanity on hands and knees, recovered it; dressed a little more, remembered that the liquor was low, rushed to the kitchen to see if that was the last quart or the next-to-the-last; saw that—*mirable dictu!*—there were two left. He finished dressing, confronted himself in the full-length mirror, and informed himself, as he always did when he wore his dinner coat, that he ought to wear it oftener. "Relaxes you to dress in the evening. Picks you right up."

What he really meant (though he would have denied it passionately) was that the dinner coat made him magnificent.

From the hip pocket of the lately-discarded gray trousers lying limp in a chair, he then extracted his wallet, and discovered that it contained—besides police cards, identification cards, addresses and telephone numbers, a New York-Boston timetable, a snapshot of Ann, and an unmailed letter one week old—the sum of six dollars, in lean infirm one-dollar bills. Grinning over this so-characteristic penury, and wagging his head in blithe despair of himself, he advanced upon Ann's dressing table and ex-

tracted from a purse in the drawer the net paper contents: thirty-two dollars. This he pocketed, replacing it a minute later with a slightly blotchy check made out to Ann for that amount. The minute had been devoted to writing the check at the studio desk. There was, he perceived, a balance in his checkbook of sixty-three dollars and forty-nine cents, over and above the two hundred dollars required as deposit by the bank. It seemed too bad that Ann had not had sixty-two dollars instead of thirty-two. He could have covered that just as well; and he might need it.

"If Puff gets restless," he thought, "and wants to go hither and yon, I'm sunk. This is no roll for changing scenery."

He said severely aloud, as if Puff were with him, "Young lady, for once in your life, you'll stay where you're put!"

He was squeezing more oranges for more cocktails when Puff rang the doorbell. At the sound he dumped gin, sugar, such orange juice as there was, additional gin and ice into the shaker, clapped the top on, wiped his hands, tweaked down his cuffs, and started.

He was standing in the hall at the head of the stairs, rattling the shaker briskly, when his guest's yellow head set in a snowy drift of ermine appeared around the bend on the landing below.

"That's a nice noise you're making," she observed as she came in sight.

"Isn't it? I thought you'd like it."

Puff lifted a white face vividly marked with the circular red seal that was her mouth. "Is that where you live?"

"It is."

"Thank God," said Puff. "I never saw so many stairs."

She came on up, assisted up the last three steps by Toby, who reached down a hand to hers, and yanked her.

"There you are!"

Their hands clung an instant, and they stood smiling at each other.

"Hello," Puff said softly.

Toby said, "Hullo, Goodlooking"—somewhat to his surprise. He had expected to say simply, "Hullo." The adjective had issued from his lips involuntarily, as a result of his eyes' discovery that Puff *was* goodlooking. Very. Much more so without a hat than she had been with one.

"How are you?" he added. "I'm awfully glad to see you, Puff."

"I'm glad to see you, too. Listen," murmured Puff, glancing back over her shoulder, "—before I forget it—have you got a dollar and twenty cents? Because of course the taxi-driver didn't have any change."

"I'll attend to him," nodded Toby. "You come in here."

He led her by the hand to the threshold of the apartment and stepped aside to let her precede him in. Puff went leisurely, allowing her wrap to slide down her arms and off; taking it for granted that he was close behind her to catch it.

"Oh, cute," her lazy voice said of the studio. "I like this a lot." . . .

A jeweled T from shoulder to shoulder and down the line of the spine, was the back of her Nile-green velvet gown. All the fullness of the skirt was gathered on her slim left hip and held there under a monstrous butterfly bow. Except on the hip, the Nile-green velvet clung to Puff, adhered to her, as if the brilliants that studded it heavily were the fancy heads of hundreds of tacks, tacking it to her skin.

"Her *mother's* dress?" Toby, incredulous, asked himself.

Puff wore green slippers, and chiffon stockings like sunburn embroidered with seams. Her yellow hair swirled across the back of her head from right to left, between rouged eartips laden with circles of jade. When she faced about—small languid hands on her hips—and confronted Toby, it was to be seen that part of the heady perfume she exuded belonged to four gardenias in a row, climbing up one shoulder.

"I do really, Toby," she assured him. "I think it's awfully artistic."

Toby was putting the ermine wrap on a chair. "Glad you like it," he said. "The by-line is Ann's, of course. She did it all."

He straightened, and began again to agitate the cocktail shaker, which he had clutched in a chilled left hand for some minutes. Standing there, rattling it high, then low, with gestures reminiscent of those of a cheerleader in action, he smiled at Puff, who stood thoughtfully watching him.

"Sit down," he said. "Speaking of things artistic—go and sit pretty in that chair and be a magazine cover, while I get this cocktail into shape."

"Which chair?" Puff inquired ingenuously.

"That black one."

Puff, obedient, strolled toward the black chair, still with her hands on her hips. At the piano, a photograph of Ann arrested her. She took it up in both hands; regarded it for a moment. "She's awfully sweet, isn't she," she observed.

"Of course, I think so."

"So do I!" Puff said with what Toby considered unnecessary earnestness.

She set the picture back in place, continuing to regard it.

"Does she like Bill Salisbury?"

"Why, sure. Don't you?" Toby countered. Though he knew that this was beside the point.

"He's all right," said Puff indifferently.

She still eyed the photograph, standing motionless before it. Toby from time to time glanced at her, smiling inwardly. He was pouring out the cocktails now, into two silver goblets.

"Did she know you called me up?"

"She knew I was going to."

Puff was silent.

"Why?" Toby said.

"I just wondered."

She turned away then, leisurely. Her white arms akimbo were like the handles of a slim green vase. "Is this the chair you meant?"

"That's the one."

"I wouldn't get the wrong chair for the world."

Seated, posed, her blond head tilted back against black satin, she reached out a hand for the goblet Toby was bringing across the room.

"Thanks, a lot."

"Lap it up," Toby said, "like a brave little girl, and in the meantime I'll go put your taxi back in circulation."

"Or shall we keep it," he asked on second thought, "till we're ready to leave?"

"Uh-uh," said Puff. "It's a terrible taxi. It wheezes."

"Away with it, then."

As it happened, it was well that he did despatch the taxi, which otherwise would have waited more than two hours . . .

Toby never knew where the time went, nor how it got to

be ten o'clock and after. He only knew that, quite unexpectedly, Puff could play the piano. She could play better ragtime than any girl he had ever known. Sitting slightly sideways on the piano bench, so that her knees, one mounted upon the other, had room, she played with a cigarette in her mouth and her slim straight fingers accurate and emphatic, like a man's. And Toby, sitting beside her, played his banjo.

It had started while he was out in the kitchen, filling a flask to take to dinner. He had propped the door open, so that he could talk to Puff, and suddenly he had heard her strike a chord. Then another. Then a series of quick, big chords, down the keyboard.

By that time he was over the threshold, pointing with a small tin funnel, crying accusingly: "*Say!* You've been keeping something from me!"

"Um-hum," Puff nodded tranquilly. "Several things."

Her straying fingers found a likely combination of notes; she began to play "Do-Do-Do," the pet piece of the moment. After three or four bars she halted, said under her breath, "Don't like that key much," and began again in another key, playing the tune through.

Toby stood behind her, watching. His lips smiled. His intent eyes, seeming to listen as well as to look, held approval, even respect; and a gleam of amazement. Puff, of all people! It was incredible that one so lackadaisical should thump and beat so wonderfully with small frail hands. He had thought Puff had no energy; he saw his mistake now. She had much, and this was how she spent it all.

"Why, good Lord," he said excitedly, when she stopped, "you're simply marvelous!"

"Thank you."

"Why didn't you *tell* me you played like that?" Toby's

tone was aggrieved, it was almost indignant. He felt that time had been wasted. Here they had sat for half an hour, just talking!

"Where's my banjo?" he demanded, setting the funnel on the piano. "I had a banjo. Now where in——"

"I see it," said Puff. "There." And she said, smiling, "So! You've been keeping something from me, too!"

Toby went for his instrument. "Come here, you rascal!" Returning, carrying it with its head hung down, he seated himself at Puff's side. "All right. What do you say? Give me G just a second, will you, first——"

Once started, they could not stop. Nor did they want to. Only such momentary delays as were occasioned by the mashing-out of cigarette stubs and the lighting of fresh cigarettes, by the hasty manufacture of highballs (because cocktails took too long to make) and the intermittent consumption of the same, were allowable. They did not say very much. They did not even, for the most part, declare their selections. One would think of a tune and commence it, and the other, after a few bars, would chime in.

"Again now."

"Try it in three flats."

"Forgotten it. What does it do after that?"

Their conversation was limited to such short business-like sentences.

"Fake it, can't you?"

"Wait a minute. Listen:——"

"That's it! That's right! And then——"

They shared little triumphs of memory, of improvisation. They worked things out. They were together, drawn close in spirit by what, together, they could create. For the time being, with the part of him that was musical,

Toby was nearly in love with Puff; though he did not know it, and would have yelled at the notion.

It was Puff who finally remembered that it must be late. Sitting for a moment relaxed, her wrists drooping, her hands caught to the keyboard by the uttermost tips of her fingers, she lifted her eyes—and the preoccupied glance, encountering Ann's photograph, became no longer preoccupied, but alert and present.

"What time is it, I wonder?" she asked.

Her hands dropped from the keys and the fingers curled on the edge of the bench at the sides of her slender body. She turned to Toby. He was bent over his banjo still. "Haven't the faintest idea," he said. "Listen. Remember this?"

He played the first bars of "Beale Street Momma," humming with the music; his expectant smiling eyes on Puff's eyes. When the response he had tried to coax from her was not forthcoming he stopped abruptly, laying the palm of his hand across the strings. "Time?" he said, as if he had just heard her. "Let's see——"

He consulted his watch. "Good Lord! Why, it's twenty past *ten*!"

Puff rose at once. "Dinner," she said. "Lots of dinner. I hadn't thought about it, but I'm starving."

"Of course you are!" Toby had risen also. "I'm awfully sorry," he added contritely. "Nice considerate host I turned out to be, didn't I!"

He pushed the bench aside, and Puff's narrow creamy jewel-strapped back preceded him around it, into the room. "It doesn't matter," she was saying as she went. "I've had a grand time. The only thing is——" Beyond the bench, she confronted him, "—I'd rather not still be here when Ann comes back. Wouldn't you? I mean,"

she explained, before he could dissent, "she'd think we were crazy, staying here for hours without any dinner."

"No, she wouldn't——"

"She'd think *something*," Puff said blandly. "Anyway. Let's get started, shall we?"

Toby would have liked, in fairness to Ann, to say, "Don't be ridiculous. She wouldn't think a thing." But Puff had a way of covering up her innuendos immediately and thoroughly, so you could not get at them; they lay unrefuted—and therefore somehow true—with a lid of other words dropped down on top.

"What did you do with my vanity bag?" she was asking now. "And where's a very big mirror in a good bright light?"

There was nothing to do but produce the bag from under the ermine wrap in the chair. There was nothing to say but, "Down those three steps, and to your left." . . .

When Puff returned, he was in the kitchen again, completing the postponed filling of the flask. He exhibited it: one of Woolworth's frosted-glass flasks, that you could empty once and throw away.

"This be enough, do you think?"

"Enough for what?" Puff smiled. "Complete oblivion? I'm quite cock-eyed already."

"You're not really?"

She shook her head. "Not really, no. On what *we've had*?" Puff's tone suggested that Toby didn't know Puff.

"A thousand pardons," he said gravely.

"I'm perfectly sober," Puff said. "But I feel glorious!" Her lashes swept up. "Don't you?"

"Yeah. Crest of the wave."

He was looking at her. Twisting the nickel cap tight on the flask without aid of his eyes, he was subjecting her

to a quizzical, rather big-brotherly inspection. She was quite new now. She had a new mouth, so moist, so recently richly applied, that you thought her every breath would surely smear it. "Do you wear a smock when you work on that?" Toby wanted to ask. And there were her lashes, each individual lash curling all by itself, black and stiff as a wire. The ends of her "windblown" bob were becalmed, they were stuck in thick gilt commas on her cheekbones, three to a check; and she was blushing brightly, fixedly, in circles.

Such a work of art she was withall, like a birthday cake, like a valentine—like every artificial ornamental tempting thing—that for an instant Toby had a juvenile vandal's impulse that almost overwhelmed him. He wanted to spoil and destroy. He wanted to ruffle the sleek coiffure with both hands, to smear the red mouth. The new moist mouth. It was too red, too new, altogether too perfect. Something really ought to be done about it . . .

"Well?" said Puff's provocative mocking voice. "Why don't you?"

She was standing very near him, and her chin was lifted a little; her eyes in their picketed frames held invitation underneath laughter. The red mouth curved. Parted. "My error!" Toby thought. "Now she thinks I want to kiss her." And he did want to. Suddenly, and very much.

"Be your age," he warned himself.

Ann . . .

He smiled down upon Puff. He reached out unhastily and plucked at one of her earrings with a forefinger, making it twist and sway on its tiny chain. He let his finger follow the line of her chin around, and with the fingertip he touched the moist mouth quickly, lightly. "And spoil

that?” he said. “Oh, no. I couldn’t. My artistic appreciation is too great.”

If Puff felt rebuffed, she did not show it. She smiled, and her eyes knew everything. “You’re funny,” she said. And when Toby, bridling as a man invariably does at this remark, demanded, “Why?”—and thereby surrendered his control of the situation—she smiled more. “Oh, you just are.”

She turned away. “Come on,” she said, and the knowing mirth was still in her voice. “Get your coat and hat and let’s go places.” She added tantalizingly, over her shoulder, “Little boy!”

“Lit-tle,” parted in the middle. “*Lit-tle b-hoy!*”—

It was too much. His dignity would not have it. He said, “Wha-a-at?” He said, “Come back here!” in a grim voice. And he pulled her back by the wrist, and turned her around by her powdered shoulders, and kissed her—not little-boyishly—after all.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

“**D**ID you kiss her?” Ann asked.

She was asking a number of cool clipped questions this morning; she was, as she herself had said ruefully only a moment ago, “making noises like a wife.” She hated realising this. “Damn it!” she had wailed. “And I always *swore* I never would!” But she could not help it. She had to know about last night, all about it. She had to ask these questions, and she seemed, in spite of herself, to have to ask them sharply, suspiciously, like a wife. “Like *any* fool wife!”——

She was very unhappy; and Toby was utterly wretched. This was the bleakest morning they had known. Ann sat on the divan, before the pile of shingles and kindlings in the fireplace that nobody had lit. She wore Chinese pajamas, vermilion with blue embroidery. They made her unaccustomed pallor even more conspicuous. She had slept little, and that lightly.

Toby stood by the fireplace, his elbow on the mantel. His elbow seemed to support him, it alone seemed to hold him erect. Sometimes, in a series of jerky motions, he distributed his weight to other muscles, straightened up, and left his post to shamble about the room. He always came back. He could look down at Ann from here. He could talk better, standing here before her. And the hand that belonged to the supporting elbow could surreptitiously nurse his forehead, which was damp and hot and over-full of a familiar throbbing.

"Take a Bromo," Ann had said earlier. "Or some aspirin. For pity's sake, take *something*!"

His hand had fallen with guilty haste. "I'm all right——"

Absurd bravado. Ann knew, only too well, that he had been drunk a few hours ago. She had seen him come in; she had helped him to bed. She was almost as well aware as he was himself that now, at noon, his head was splitting. But the remnants of his pride would not let him acknowledge it, nevertheless. He preferred to suffer, saying, "I feel okay. Really."

Ann's cross-examination followed a testimony that was straightforward and honest, but of necessity halting and vague. Toby had reached home at five A. M. (Ann supplied that fact). A confused interval prior to five had been spent by him in trying to get home, on a bus or busses going in the wrong direction or directions. Before that, there had been a party in an uptown apartment owned by the absent parents of a short fat college boy, a friend of Puff's. Before that, the Club Richman, where they had encountered the short fat boy, another undergraduate and two girls—all friends of Puff's. Before that, Luigi's speakeasy, where they had had a highball and Toby had cashed a check for thirty dollars. Before that, dinner.

In reverse recollection, which was easier, he and Puff had dined till midnight at the Roosevelt Grill, they had paused at Luigi's for about ten minutes, they had gone to Richman's and danced till it closed, and then, with Puff's little playmates, they had taxied to this apartment, stopping at Childs' on the way for scrambled eggs.

He was terribly sorry. He simply couldn't tell her how sorry he was. About everything. He'd never forgive himself for keeping her awake worrying all night. And of course he was "just a hundred and sixty-eight pounds

of gelatin" when he did come; he hated like hell to think she had seen him like that——

"You weren't pretty," Ann agreed.

She asked him how he had happened to drink so much. She wondered, aloud, if this were "the beginning of something? Or the starting-in-again, rather!"

She apologised an instant afterward. "Oh, I'm sorry, Toby. I didn't mean that. I'm just—upset."

The thing she minded most, she said, was that he could have forgotten her so utterly. Hadn't he thought of her *once*, between midnight and five? Well, when? Certainly not when he was leaving the Roosevelt. And certainly not when he was leaving the night club. How would *he* have felt if she had stayed out with Bill Salisbury until five in the morning? Let him think about that a while!

But the thing Ann really minded most, as it turned out, was Puff. Puff coming down here after Toby in the first place, "—and spilling my perfume, and using my powder pad for rouge—and burning a cigarette mark on the piano!" Puff being able to accompany Toby's banjo so wonderfully. (Ann could not even keep a tune). Puff introducing Toby—Ann's Toby—as if he were *hers*. Puff making Toby forget to come home.

These were the things Ann minded. She did not say so; but her questions told. Toby found himself thinking with a sort of dull astonishment, "She's jealous. *Ann* is! Of that little——" His mind stopped there. Even his mind was inarticulate, powerless to find a word or term that would express the infinite unimportance to him of Puff, compared with Ann.

And so it was that when Ann asked at last, "Did you kiss her, Toby?" he could not, for a moment, answer anything at all. He could only stare blankly, helplessly, at her, as if he sought the answer in her face. He knew the

answer. But it was inexplicable; and the realization that he could neither explain to Ann, nor lie to her, made him stand there tongue-tied and aghast.

"Oh," Ann cried out, "don't you *remember* what you did?"

"I remember what I didn't do," quickly, "if that's what you mean."

"But you kissed her." It was a statement now, no longer a query.

"Yes," Toby said, "I'm afraid I did."

Ann took it calmly. She was all at once calmer than she had been at any time. "More than once?" she asked, and her voice was even. It was as if she had dreaded this knowledge so long that, now, her relief because dreading was ended exceeded her hurt. Toby had not lied, anyway; and that was something. He knew from her eyes that that was something.

"Yes," he said. "A couple of times."

"Tell me."

"There's nothing to tell. I'd had a lot to drink—It didn't *mean* anything, Ann," Toby said.

He wished she would look up again. If she looked up, she would see that it hadn't meant anything. "Look at me," he begged. "Ann. Please."

But she would not.

"When, exactly?" her quiet lips inquired.

Toby thought, "I don't know! I don't remember!" But he did remember, wanting not to. He said, "When we were at this fellow's apartment. And in some taxicab or other. And—once while we were here. Just before we left."

"In other words," said Ann, "every chance you got——"

Her voice broke then. She shook her head quickly, in

a mute courageous attempt to deny the scalding moisture that, Toby knew, was suddenly behind her lowered eyelids. It was futile. There had been a shining lovely thing, inestimably precious, and now, when it was still quite new, it had been smudged a little. She must weep for this, being a woman, being a bride. She could not take it calmly any more, for a little while.

"I'll be all right," she kept promising, "in a minute—" "Don't Toby," she kept saying tonelessly. "Let me alone. I'll be all right."

She said she was sorry to make such a fuss; it was silly of her. She understood perfectly how it had happened. "You were just tight. I see how it was." But she would not allow him to put his arms around her to comfort her. "Don't, Toby. I—not just this minute."

When she was better, when her eyes were dry and Toby's handkerchief was restored to him, she said philosophically and rather cynically that of course this sort of thing was bound to happen now and then. "We'll kiss other people. Both of us will. We're young, and we're attractive if we are married. And this is the age we live in. Of course it'll happen. If we're never any more seriously unfaithful to one another, we'll be lucky——"

"Don't talk like that!" Toby broke in sharply.

Ann did not heed him. "It's only that it happened so soon," she wound up. "I sort of hadn't thought it would, quite yet." . . .

Presently she could mock at herself, in a wanly-smiling, mirthless way. "And *I'm* the girl who sat on the beach at Atlantic City—two months ago—solemnly insisting that married people ought to have dates! I still think," she added, sobering, "it's a good theory. It's only when—when one of them sort of—oh, betrays the other's trust—that it doesn't work out. I'd have been all right about

it," Ann said earnestly, "if you'd just gone out, and dined, and danced, and—been yourself. You know that, don't you, Toby?"

She was rather pathetically anxious that he should know that. "*I wanted* you to go," she said. "Remember how I kept telling you to try Puff's number again? I meant it. I wanted you to have somebody cute to be with. Honestly, Toby——" Her eyes besought him to believe her, "I'm *not* just jealous on general principles!——"

It was almost more than he could bear. "Ann, *don't!*" he kept groaning. "Don't you think I know all that? You're making me feel like—like——" He never left a simile unfinished. "Like something that eats its young," he muttered now distractedly.

He was not to see Puff again: that was the upshot of the two-hour dialogue. Ann was ashamed to make the stipulation, and she said so. "But," she said, "From now on, I'm not going to try to be any more generous than I'm capable of being. And I can't be generous at all about Puff Randolph, because——" She smiled wryly. "Because my ridiculous pride is hurt, I suppose! I suppose that's it."

Her voice trailed off. She put her head back against the back of the divan and eyed the cold hearth from under her lashes. She was still slightly smiling. "Maybe I'm wrong," she said, "but if I do say so as shouldn't, Toby,—I think I'm sort of nice. I mean, taking me all in all. In fact I seem to think I'm so much nicer than *Puff Randolph*, that it isn't even funny. And so," said Ann, "for *her* to think she's put something over on *me*——"

It was vain for Toby to vow that Puff didn't think anything of the kind. "Of course she does," Ann contradicted him. "You don't know women. Especially sixteen-year-old ones who think they're Greta Garbo——"

She checked herself. "I'm getting catty. But I know what I know. You see, Toby, Puff wouldn't *dream* that you'd tell me you kissed her. She thinks it's a thrilling secret between herself and my husband—something that you and she got away with when I wasn't looking—And *that*," concluded young Mrs. McLean with spirit, "burns me up!"

And there was no arguing with her.

"Come here," she said, when Toby tried to argue. "Sit down here."

He sat down quickly. He took her in his arms, perceiving that now, at last, he could, she wished him to. Gently with his big hand he drew her head down against his heart, until he felt it recoil a little from the alien bulge of a packet of cigarettes stuffed into his hidden pajama pocket. He removed the cigarettes, dropping them anywhere, and replaced the head and patted it. Smooth little head. Beloved little head, compact under its thick silk hair. It made him fiercely tender, immensely possessive. *His*.

Relief was a paeon inside him. "I love you so much," he said. "Ann. You know it. This guy you married—he isn't much good. He's just a bum. But he does love you tremendously."

Ann's hand stole around his neck, tucked its fingertips inside his collar. Her voice was soft, subdued; contented now. "You do, don't you?"

He let the muscles of his arms make quick reply.

"And you don't really want to kiss anyone else?"

"No! Never."

"And," said Ann, "you won't see Puff any more at all? Just to please me," she said, "because I'm silly?"

"I will not!" Toby was emphatic, positive. He maintained that he wouldn't have anyway. "Ask me something hard!" he begged. "That's too easy."

But that was all Ann asked.

CHAPTER TWELVE

TIP FERGUSON did not quit the *Star*. He kept on writing his column—at a salary increased to equal, even to exceed, the salary offered him by another paper. Toby and Bill Hastings talked it over privately, and agreed that they should have shot the fellow. “There’s no other way,” Hastings said. “He’s got to go.”

They were cheerful, with a cheerfulness that deceived neither of them. Each was privately bitterly disappointed. Each had hoped for the column, against the other. Now that the matter was settled, and neither was beaten though both had lost, they could admit their rivalry; they had carefully avoided any reference whatever to it, while it existed. Now they discussed it, and argued as to which of them would have supplanted Tip, if either had. “You’d have got it, of course,” each assured the other. “I didn’t have a prayer.” And, “Go *on!*” the other snorted. “‘Didn’t have a prayer, my grandmother! Why, listen——”

Toby was a little disgusted with both of them. “Just a couple of smashed cakes frosting each other!”

Well, that was that. Forget it. Stop reading Tip’s column every day with an eye to improvements and changes, cut out the post mortems, and worry about something else. There were, he assured himself, enough other things to worry about. . . .

There was money, for one thing.

November was almost over. The amateur football season would end on Saturday, and Toby had written the

last of the daily football articles "By Barry Brent." This left him freer, and richer by a wrist watch, inscribed from Brent to himself, and a case of beer. For the use of Brent's name on the stories, of which there had been some sixty, the Star had paid four thousand five hundred dollars. "I'd like nothing better," Brent had told Toby, "than to offer to split with you. But they tell me that that's not ethical." . . .

Nothing had been heard from "Cabaret Lady." It had been mailed four weeks ago, but nothing had happened. This might or might not be a hopeful sign; Toby didn't know, and dared not ask. Of the two articles begun in October, one was dying on page seven; the other was dead, cremated, and forgotten. Except for his salary, he had made no money at all in November. Ann, of course, had made four hundred dollars—extra; but that was Ann's. The financial condition of the family was Toby's financial condition, and this was not better by so much as a penny than it had been at November's bad beginning.

He was really worried. He knew he should be, and he was. As the first of December approached he said to himself, "Now listen here: In a week or so you're going to need fifteen hundred dollars and *how!* Now what about it? What are you going to do?"

The first thing he did was lose ninety-seven dollars in a dice game.

Ann was not informed. She would be distressed, and he doubted his ability to justify to her his participation in the game to begin with. In imagination he could hear her: "But Tob-y! Didn't you know you had just as much chance of losing as you had of winning?" Sure, he had known that all right. Or rather, he had known that there was some chance of his losing. Maybe not as much. He had always been pretty lucky with dice. "Well, then!"

Ann would say, ignoring the amendment. "Why did you risk it? Toby, how *could* you? When we owe everybody!"

He couldn't explain. The explanation was simple, and clear enough to him; but it took a masculine mind to understand it. Charlie Sully of the Bulletin had owed him thirty dollars since last Decoration Day at Indianapolis. In the back room of a little bar next door to the Bulletin office, he had happened upon Charlie and others from that paper, shooting crap. Charlie was a heavy winner. Toby, seeing three lost ten-dollar bills return from limbo, had cleared his throat and said (apologetically, for he always hated saying any such thing), "Say, Charlie, that reminds me——"

Charlie had lent a reluctant ear. He had been able, with some assistance, to recall his indebtedness and the circumstances surrounding it. "You're right," he had agreed at last, "I remember now. I borrowed it to butter a house detective."

He had handed Toby the thirty dollars, at the same time moving over to make room. The whole circle, on its several pairs of hands and knees, had moved over. It had been taken for granted that Toby would join the game. Hadn't he just been handed thirty dollars?

This was the part that Ann wouldn't understand. She wouldn't see, and probably couldn't be made to see, that nobody but a heel could have pocketed the thirty, said, "Well, toodle-oo," or something, and gone off. "Nobody but a heel, or any woman!"

But even Toby himself couldn't see why he had lost so heavily. He should have quit when the thirty dollars was gone, at the very latest. The thing was that, in the beginning, it had not gone, it had increased and multiplied; he had been more than two hundred ahead during the first half hour. Then, when his luck turned, he had somehow

felt sure its defection was temporary: a belief to which he was clinging still when somebody said, "What time is it?" and the Bulletin's staff decided it was time they were getting to work. . . .

He went forth fuming, enraged at himself. He said bitterly to Hank Lehmann at the office when he reached it, "Behold the Village Idiot!" And he bowed low, with his hand upon his heart.

Lehmann surveyed him impassively. "No caption is needed," he said. "I know you. But—I mean, why? What now?"

"I just lost damn near the whole of next week's salary, that's all."

"Oh, is that all?"

Toby was removing his coat and hat and trying to hang them on an overloaded peg. The coat stuck, but the hat dropped twice to the floor. When it fell the third time, he kicked it under a desk.

Bareheaded, his hands on his hips holding his suit coat back from a waistcoat with three pencils and fountain pen in the pocket, he confronted Lehmann. "No," he said, "it isn't. At the present writing, I owe the world one thousand five hundred *and* ninety-seven dollars—and if you say, 'Is that all' to *that*, I'm going to smash you!"

Lehmann gazed dreamily off across the room. "I won't say it," he promised. "As a matter of fact, I don't believe it is all, my dear boy."

He meant something. "What do you mean?" Toby demanded.

"I mean," said Lehmann, "—it pains me to mention this—but does that one thousand five hundred and ninety-seven dollars include, by any chance, the twenty smacks you borrowed from me before the fight in Philly? Ah, I thought not!"

It was that sort of day. Every slight misfortune that could possibly come to pass in a few short hours, came to pass in the few hours that followed. Toby's story went badly; it took him two hours to do it, and when it was done he couldn't find the first page anywhere. After fruitless profane minutes spent in spreading out the crumpled sheets that almost filled a giant wastebasket, he abandoned the search, and rewrote the page as well as he could from memory. At some point in these proceedings, a hidden nail beneath the desk at which he sat caught the knee of his trousers and tore a quite unmendable three-cornered rent. The trousers belonged to his newest suit. There was only one pair.

Before he left the office, the sports editor, Mose Fitzgerald, summoned him to his elbow to tell him that every paper in town had scooped them on certain salient points of the Army-Navy story. Mose had a cold, and was unusually irascible. "What were you doing all of yesterday?" he wanted to know. "Snoozing? Taking little shut-eye? Doing your Christmas shopping early, maybe? Or are you trying to drink America dry again?"

"I am not," said Toby to that.

He thought grimly, "*There's* an idea!"

On his way out, he paused at the copy desk long enough to ascertain from Pop O'Neill that the chances of getting back all, or any smallest part of, the two hundred dollars he had lent Pop in October were, for the present at least, just as slim as he had feared; then he went home, via a crowded shuttle and an equally crowded subway train that was stalled for fifteen minutes somewhere between Forty-second Street and Thirty-third. . . .

"Toby McLean," wailed Ann when she saw him, "you've torn your suit! Your *new suit*!"

He glared at her. "No! Not really?"

Ann's silence was like a gasp.

"I'm sorry," Toby muttered. "But—you didn't have to tell me." He had left the door open behind him. He went back now, and slammed it shut. Turning, he cast the rolled-up newspaper he was carrying into a chair, and confronted Ann as he had confronted Lehmann, feet planted wide. "Would you mind," he asked her, speaking very distinctly, "if I got *cockeyed*?"

It was curious, he thought in the next few seconds, what your wife's steady glance could do to you; how foolish it could make you, how little and how limp. No other eyes in the world could so explode you, as if you were a blown-up paper bag, a flimsy thin one. You wanted to say, "It was just a mistake." You wanted to cry out, "I take it back!" You wanted the telephone to ring insistently, so you could get away and go and answer.

The telephone didn't ring.

"All right," sighed Toby at last. "You win. I won't—only don't look at me like that."

Ann's expression softened. She remarked, after an instant, that of course he hadn't meant it literally. "You didn't really want to get 'cock-eyed'—*again tonight*?"

"No, not really. Of course not."

(Liar!" he said to himself. "Coward!")

He told another lie to Ann that evening. To buy their dinner, he had to borrow money from her; and Ann, lending it willingly, nevertheless seemed to wish to know what had become of "all that money, Saturday's salary," that she had glimpsed in his wallet today at lunch time.

Toby was writing a check for her, under date of next Saturday. Now he waved the check to dry it. "I paid some insurance," he said. "It was overdue, and I thought I'd better."

This was the first deliberate downright lie he had ever told Ann.

He was surprised to find that it was almost easy.

§

For a week thereafter he busied himself with divers attempts to raise money. These attempts were alternately hysterical and half-hearted, frenzied and listless. Sometimes he thought of his debts as one debt: as sixteen hundred dollars; more than he could hope to borrow, or gain, or scrape together. "Why, Je-ru-salem, there *isn't* sixteen hundred dollars!" Facetious phrase; but true. For him, for Toby McLean, there wasn't. And whenever he realised this, he grew discouraged, slackened his efforts, stopped trying to collect what was owed him—a drop in the bucket anyway—and went and had a long rye high-ball.

At other times the sixteen hundred divided itself in his mind, the whole became the less terrifying sum of its parts, and he determined to gather together as much money as he could and pay as many bills as he was able. With any luck at all, he could pay the very urgent ones. The rest could go over till January—and why not? They always had.

His enormous generosity was known to many men, and many had taken advantage of it. Upon these, in this more sanguine mood, he called—feeling mean, feeling guilty; feeling like a cross between a miser and a thief. He had a very ancient, very dirty pocket notebook in which their names were jotted, with the dates of the transactions, and the amounts, which ranged from two to two hundred dollars. In the preliminary survey of the pages of this book, he had drawn quick pencil-lines through some of the

entries. Scotty Clark was dead, poor old boy. (What a story that was Scotty wrote on the fight at Shelby!) Johnny Ryan was running a weekly paper somewhere down south. Perkins was with the Paris Herald, Legendre was in San Francisco. Nobody seemed to know where Jim Lewis was. Chris Hanley had tried to borrow more, just a few days ago. . . .

When all such obvious impossibilities were eliminated, some sixteen or seventeen gentlemen of the press owed Toby, among them, five hundred-odd dollars. Of this, he was able to collect about eighty, in tens and fives. What it cost him in compunction and chagrin to do so was incalculable. Not that everybody wasn't perfectly square about it! Everybody was. Each peered at his name in the little book, and either remembered the loan, or said, "Well—I'll take your word for it, Toby." But they were all a little hurt, a little reproachful; their eyes suggested that a pal had turned against them. Plaintively they spoke of ailing wives, of costly sweethearts; of the First of the Month, and of Christmas coming. . . . Toby usually ended up by trying to restore the money, if, indeed, any money had changed hands. "I don't need it, honestly. I just thought if you could spare it—But you can pay me sometime later on."

A week of this sort of thing was enough. In a fit of extreme distaste for the whole performance, he burned the notebook—and was at once both glad and sorry. He told himself that he had consigned four hundred dollars to flames; but he knew he had not, and the holocaust made him feel better. Larger. "It's no use, anyway," he thought. "I can't dun these guys. If they ever have the dough, they'll know where to find me."

He had other projects. He was negotiating with a promoter named Zimmerman, who owned a hockey club and

wanted publicity matter written. Also, he was making dogged efforts to sell himself to the editor of the Star's Sunday magazine section as the logical man to write the proposed "My Life: By Homer Boyle," in ten installments. Boyle was a very great short stop, of course; perhaps the greatest shortstop of his day; but his literary ability was unfortunately nil, and in the fulfillment of the agreement he had lately signed with the Star for his autobiography—fifty thousand literate words of it—somebody would have to pinch-hit for him.

Toby desired to be that somebody. The assignment (unlike the Barry Brent assignment for the sports page, which had been part of his job) would be remunerative; if he got it, he would ask for money in advance, as he would from Zimmerman also if he got that. He had it all planned. The autobiography would necessitate a flying trip to Muncie, Indiana, where, in the intervals of ball playing, Boyle conducted a tobacco shop. Toby thought to make this trip during the third week in December, and to write the story during the two subsequent weeks. Sports would be quiet through the holiday season. He would have plenty of time.

While these things were hanging fire, he inquired after "Cabaret Lady." He did this by mail, and rather in fear and trembling, lest his impatience militate against him. If a sale to this particular magazine was indicated, he didn't want to kill it, Heaven knew. On the other hand, if, as he suspected, the manuscript was already clipped with a rejection slip, he might as well have it back now, immediately, as await some secretary's bored convenience. He could send it somewhere else, try another market. His faith in it was failing—it had seemed a good story, but that was when it was newly-done, when anything seemed good; he had not read it over since. "Probably it's lousy,"

he thought now. But it might not be. It might sell somewhere.

In the meantime, December came; the bills came by handfulls; and Toby said nonchalantly, "Just stick them in the drawer. When they're all here, I'll attend to them."

Afterward, he thought he should have realised that Ann's silence, her failure to interrogate him or to make any comment at all, was portentous. He thought he should have foreseen that she would do just what she did do. But that was afterward, when she had done it.

§

He saw Puff.

The encounter was no fault of his own, and his instant mental reaction was the shaping of words in which he would describe it, later, to Ann: "Oh, incidentally! Your little friend Puff was there. Yeah. I saw her a minute, as I was leaving——"

Like a telegraph instrument his mind ticked out the running account while his genial voice cried, "Why, hullo!" While his fingers that were dyed at the tips from pinching at a recalcitrant typewriter ribbon closed quick and strong around her proffered hand. He grinned immensely, being surprised, and not displeased. Puff, very blond, very Parisian, in black. Bright yellow hair and a black hat. Hazy perfume. Click of half-a-dozen slave-link bracelets under her cuff. Eyelashes as usual.

He thought, for telling Ann, "Little too spectacular, though, the whole effect. And she's got some lipstick on a tooth. On two teeth, in fact."

He said, "Well! What are *you* doing here?"

This was Madison Square Garden. The six-day bicycle race was on, and in its third day now; Toby was covering

it. To anyone interested, the fact of his presence in the press box every evening from eight o'clock until after the sprints at midnight was revealed by his signed daily story; Puff had evidently been reading the *Star*. Too late he realised that she was here because he was here, and that, being Puff, she would probably admit it.

She did. "Watching you," she said matter-of-factly, as if this were the only entertainment the Garden offered. "I wanted to see a sports writer in action."

They stood beyond the head of the aisle of steps that led down to the press box. Toby, ascending these steps with the lounging lazy-looking fleetness that characterised his movements—ascending with head bent, as if the scarf that swung in two long ends from his neck were heavy—had not heard Puff's voice till he reached the top. There it arrested him, and he glanced back. Puff was four steps below him. A boy with a tall card in his hat, who bore a basket containing—he made no secret of it—candy and crackerjacks, peanuts and popcorn, had momentarily impeded her upward progress. Puff when first glimpsed was striving to wither this youth with a look, and at the same time, to keep starry eyes upon Toby.

In her wake, there followed a gentleman, unmistakably her escort, though he had the air of one more brought than bringing. At close range, this was a very young gentleman, perhaps twenty, with a combed brown head and shell-rimmed spectacles, behind which he appeared to have retired to think things over. Puff murmured that his name was Wintringer; her tone seemed to add, "if it matters."

She said to Toby, "We've been here ever since the theatre. Sitting right down there. Right in back of that man with his feet up."

Toby looked, politely. "Near as that? Why didn't you sing out? Or throw something at me?"

Puff hadn't wanted to interrupt him. "You were so busy. I was terribly impressed."

Young Mr. Wintringer, after shaking hands, had made himself comfortable in the background. He stood withdrawn in spirit, through his shell-rims regarding the track in the arena below where the bicycles circled slowly now, after their midnight speeding, slowly and patiently, and inexorably, as if forever. Young Mr. Wintringer's eyes did not seem to understand bicycle racing. Toby said kindly, "See that one just going into his tent?—His partner's going to ride for him now, while he rests—That's Iron-man McNamara."

"Oh. Yes," said Wintringer vaguely.

Puff was more honest. "Whoever *he* is!"

She was arranging her coat, pulling its collar close at the throat. "Come on," she urged them both, glancing at Toby. "You were leaving, weren't you? How do you get out of this funny place?"

Toby thought, for telling Ann: "So I led the babes-in-the-woods as far as the Eighth Avenue entrance, and tucked 'em into a taxi——"

But the story, as it turned out, ran: "—and got in with them——"

So he wouldn't tell Ann anything, after all. Better scrap the whole tale, since this development, that involved the breaking of his promise to her, would find his listener **hard** and unforgiving.

Yet it was because of a loyalty to Ann, a wish to protect her against Puff's intuition—it was mainly because of this that he broke the promise. He had no hope that he could make Ann believe it; he would not try; but it was so.

Descending stairs in the Garden, clickety-click on tiny heels, Puff had said confidentially (Wintringer was behind them), "Was Ann simply furious about the other night?"

"No, not at all."

He felt her side-long glance. Awaited, stiffly, on his guard, what she would say.

She didn't say it. Not just then. Instead she complained that he hadn't telephoned her since that evening. "You might at least have called up to find out if I survived!"

"I should've, shouldn't I," Toby said.

Neither of them referred to the several calls she had made to the office in the ten-days' interim. Toby naturally would not, having ignored the messages; and Puff—"for once in her life," he thought—had some shame. Or hadn't she? Perhaps it was only that her mind was busy remembering the party. "What a bender!" she was saying, smiling reminiscently. "What time did you get home? Or *didn't* you?"

"Five o'clock."

"And Ann wasn't mad?"

Here it came again. . . .

"No," he said coldly. "Ann doesn't get mad."

"You mean to tell me she didn't *say anything*?"

"She did not."

Again Puff smiled. He could feel her smiling. "You wouldn't fool me, would you?" she murmured.

This was unanswerable, because it was hardly a question at all, and to answer it was to protest too much. Besides, they had reached the street. "Don't be a sap," Toby grunted, in an aside. He said to Wintringer, "You want that taxi, don't you?"

"Taxi!" piped Wintringer, suddenly beckoning.

"What about you?" said Puff to Toby.

"I'll take the subway."

"Where to?"

"*Chez moi.*"

"Oh, why?" Puff remonstrated. "Don't go home yet! It's early. It isn't one o'clock, even. You don't *have* to go home for a *little* while, do you?"

"I don't have to, no."

"Then come on with us and have something to eat, or something. Come on!" urged Puff, pulling at his sleeve. Laughing at him. "What are you looking so owly-eyed about? *Ann* won't mind!"

So he went, to show her that Ann wouldn't.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THEN everything happened at once. Everything that had been threatening, in one never-to-be-forgotten day befell him. Fate had no mercy, that day. Fate was a pugilist, relentless, insensate; lashed into fiendish fury by the shiftiness of this weakling, this bantamweight opponent, who had dodged the blows too long. Fate caught him now, and forced him back against the ropes, and held him, pounding him: "Take that! And that! And *that!*"—And there was no bell, and there was no referee.

It began in the morning. It was a gradual infliction, beginning almost imperceptibly. The breakfast toast had been burned and then scraped, no cigarettes were to be found in the place, his cherished "By Toby McLean" had accidentally been left off his story in the paper; these things were irritating, certainly—but they were not recognisable as harbingers of woe. Only when he had lived this day through could he see them as such, thinking, "From the *minute I got out of bed*——!"

He had risen early, for him. It was barely eleven o'clock in the morning when he opened the bedroom door and shuffled across the little hall to the cold shower that was needed to waken and rouse him. In the bathroom, Missouri was scrubbing the tiled floor, on her hands and knees. Dimly—he was almost sleepwalking—he remarked her presence; and in an unintelligible mumble he ordered her out. Missouri collected her pail and cloths and brushes, and heaved to her feet. She said something

about Ann and something about his breakfast, but he did not know what it was she said about either.

Entering the studio a little later, wide awake, wet-haired, and slick and shaven—human now, lacking only hot black coffee—he shouted, “Missouri!” And when the negress arrived from the kitchen, “Where’s Mrs. McLean, did you tell me?”

It appeared that Ann had had an early appointment. “She lef’ here nine o’clock,” Missouri reiterated patiently. “She say to tell you she be back by noon, if she ain’t phoned.”

Toby nodded, reaching for the paper. “Don’t give me grapefruit this morning. I want orange juice.”

Glancing over the front-page headlines, none of which arrested his attention, he thought of last night. “Damn it,” he thought immediately. He should have come home. He should have put Puff in her place with one deft sentence, suavely spoken—(here he paused to frame the very sentence, and one or two others almost as good)—and having spoken, he should have bowed politely, smiled ironically, turned on his heel, and left her there. He could see himself doing it. In his mind’s eye, a man like Adolph Menjou in the guise of Toby McLean was bowing politely, smiling ironically. . . . This vision charmed him for a moment; then reality blotted it out. “Damn her, anyway!”

He tried not to know, but he knew: Puff had made a monkey of him—*again!* He rattled his paper noisily, as if to deafen himself to this mental admission. He shifted his position, uncrossed his knees and recrossed them. He bellowed to Missouri for his breakfast. “Well, snap it up, can’t you?” He had to bellow at someone, about something.

When Ann came home, she would say, “What time did

you get in last night?" She had been asleep at three a. m. She would say, "I'm glad you telephoned me at—what was it, one o'clock? I'd have been awfully worried if you hadn't." She might, or she might not, inquire idly who the boys were with whom he had said he was "just sitting around here, talking things over," in Andreani's on Forty-ninth Street. If she did inquire, he would answer, "Oh—Shorty, and Joe Williams, and Bill Corum——"

Any newspaper names would do. The trouble with this particular prevarication was, not that it would be difficult to put over (it wouldn't be) but that the game had not been worth the candle. He hadn't enjoyed the two hours with Puff and young Wintringer. He had not been amused, nor had his presence proved to Puff what he had meant it to prove; he saw that now. And now, for those two futile hours—for boredom, for a beefsteak sandwich, for a lot of inferior brandy—he must look Ann in the eyes, and lie, and lie. There was no percentage. "Damn it to *hell!*——"

All these things he thought, awaiting his breakfast.

The story without a by-line was the next thing. This had seemed, when he wrote it, just another bike-race story. Now he perceived that it was the finest bike-race story he had ever written in his life, "*—and look at it! Anonymous as a dirty joke!*" That was always the way, always. Do something specially good, and they left your name off every time! (He remembered one other time, two years ago.) "Never knew it to fail!"

Swearing, he threw the paper down.

"Missouri!"

"Yassuh?"

"Come here a minute. . . . What is this, may I ask?"

Missouri eyed it uncertainly. "'At? 'At's a piece of toas'."

"Don't kid me!" Toby grunted. "It's a souvenir of the Chicago fire. I know a former shingle when I see one." He cast it from him. "Now for God's sake, make me *toast!* That I can *eat!*"

He had cigarettes by the time Ann came; Missouri had been despatched to the corner to buy some. But for half an hour his matutinal craving had gone unsatisfied, there had been nothing to smoke, not even a yesterday's stub in an ash tray; and the vain search and the deprivation had not improved his temper. Neither had an unsuccessful telephone call, made before Missouri returned. He had tried to call Zimmerman, who had promised him a decision this day on the matter of the hockey club publicity. Zimmerman was not there. They said he was in Canada. He would be gone two weeks or more. He had left no word for Mr. McLean.

Evidently that was the answer. Hanging up the receiver, Toby quoted aloud, "'P. S. I got the job'—*Yeah!*" he added dourly. "In a pig's eye!"

He had needed that job. He had counted on getting it. He stood very still for a minute, staring down at the telephone. . . .

The day of adversity had begun in earnest.

§

"Now *why*," said Ann, "all this sudden surprising interest in the *bills*?"

"Isn't it high time?"

"Well, maybe, but——"

"I know," Toby interrupted. "It isn't like me. I

know all that." He wrenched open another drawer of the desk. "They're not in here either——"

The drawer slammed. Toby straightened in the chair, facing Ann. "What'd you tell me they were in the desk for, anyway?"

"Aren't they?"

"You know damn well they're not!"

Ann was collecting her coat, hat, gloves and pocket-book from the armchair near the door, where, entering, she had disposed them. "All right," she said resignedly, "if you must know——"

The bills were paid. She had paid them a week ago, all of them, with her own money. Bills for furniture, bills for clothing, Toby's clothing as well as hers. Boot-leggers' bills. The bill for the flowers for her shoulder.

Ann did not go into details. She simply stated, "I paid them." But to Toby it was as if she said, "I bought your liquor, and your winter overcoat, and those silk pajamas you're wearing—and the orchids, and the candy—and my wedding ring——"

It was hideous.

"Why?" he demanded.

Ann told him why. She seemed a shade surprised that he had asked. "Somebody had to pay them."

Toby's eyes narrowed. "Oh, I see! And you, being the breadwinner——"

Ann was sitting down now. She put her head back wearily against the back of the chair. "Oh Lord. I was afraid of this," she murmured.

Then her head came up again. "Listen to me a minute, Toby!"

But Toby would not listen. He was exceedingly angry. "Listen, hell!" he shouted. "You listen to *me*!"

And in a minute Ann was angry too.

"May I ask one question?" she said coldly, when she could. Hers was a still and frozen anger, not like Toby's. "Did you," she asked, "or didn't you, have the money to pay those bills?"

"That's neither here nor——"

"Don't hedge. Just answer me. You didn't have it," Ann answered herself. "You not only didn't have it, but you weren't lifting a finger to get it. In the two months and a half we've been married, what've you done about those bills? Nothing. Not one thing. And that being the case," said Ann, "if I were you, I'd keep quite quiet. And be thankful that——"

She got no farther.

"'Thankful!'" Toby spat the word. "'Thankful,' eh? I shouldn't bite the hand that's feeding me—is that it? I ought to *fawn* a little, I suppose! Jesus!" he cried. "What do you think I am, anyway—a God damn *gigolo*?"

He took two strides, and wheeled on Ann again. "And another thing! What makes you so sure I haven't 'lifted a finger,' as you call it? How do you know I——"

Ann cut in. "Oh, don't be fantastic," she said with weary scorn.

"Yeah? '*Fantastic*?' Let me tell you something——"

"Do!" said Ann.

She made it impossible, by that sardonic short command. She nullified everything that he would tell her, before he spoke. He could tell her nothing. His lips closed, tight. "Believe what you like," he snapped. And added, out of injury, "No use trying to tell you anything, ever. You know it all."

Ann said, "I know *you*, anyway."

She said much more. And Toby said more also. The original point of dispute was lost in the chaos of utterances, until they forgot how it was that this frenzy had

started. Now they quarreled over Toby's drinking; over Ann's work; over Toby's attitude towards Ann's work, which Ann maintained had been "contemptible" from the very beginning. Violently they bickered over trifles dragged from memory; incidents made grievances, *pro tem*. There was the incident of the manuscript which Toby had neglected to mail for Ann, who had found it days afterward, stamped and sealed, in a brief case in the studio closet. Belatedly now she appeared to believe that Toby's sin of omission had been deliberate, malicious—done out of jealousy. There was the episode of the handsome young polo player, an acquaintance of Toby's, who had "tried to promote" Ann at one of the Sunday evening parties. Now, of a sudden, the fact was (according to Toby) that this had been Ann's fault, Ann had led him on, she had behaved outrageously.

"Well, anyway," said Ann, "I didn't kiss him!"

Then there was Puff, and Toby instantly on the defensive:—"You *would* bring that up!"——

Ann said that Toby was lazy, that he had talent but no ambition, brains but no backbone; that he would never get anywhere. Toby, hit where he lived, struck back with statements to the effect that Ann's work was the only thing in the world for which she cared, and that she was letting everything else, her home, her marriage, "—everything but your *typewriter!*"—go to rack and ruin. That brought them around to Toby's drinking again, Ann having retorted that as between a typewriter and a husband who absolutely reeked of liquor all the time, she naturally chose the typewriter. Toby said, "What do you mean, 'all the time?'" Ann said, "All the time lately. You haven't drawn a sober breath in the last two weeks, and you know it." This was not true, and Toby, among other things, said, "You give me a *pain!*——"

Ann's reply was the inevitable one:

"Well. If that's the way you feel——" She shrugged.
"You know what you can do."

So Toby did it.

A brief necessary delay rather spoiled the effect of his departure; such exits should be instantaneous to be their most dramatic, and he unfortunately was not dressed. But when he had dressed he strode through the studio without speaking to Ann, crammed on his hat as if there had been no lapse of time whatever between his wish to do so and its fulfillment, yanked the door open, heard its shattering bang behind him, and, on the whole, felt satisfied that Ann was shown a thing or two. . . .

§

In a speakeasy called Harry's, he cooled off—in spite of himself. He would have preferred to remain angry. By recalling, word for word, the more caustic of Ann's recriminations, by telling himself that she thought him a loafer, a drunkard, and a ne'er-do-well, he sought to fan his anger, to keep it flaming. But this he was unable to do, for long. To remember that Ann's eyes had hated him was to remember, that, underneath their hard derisive glaze, there had been suffering—and incredulity. "Is this I?" her eyes had wondered. "Saying these terrible things to *you*?" She had not meant them. His intelligence, functioning after two soothing beers, persuaded him that Ann had meant no more of what she said than he had meant of what he had said to her. And for the fact that she had several times hit the nail square on the head, he had himself to blame. There was a nail there.

He broke pretzels in his fingers and fed himself the pieces, and munched them slowly, ruminatively.

Ann had done him but one injustice. This was his ultimate conclusion. He could discard such palpably preposterous, childish taunts as that about his having "hidden" her manuscript. Ann would be much ashamed of that, it was unworthy of her; he had felt only pity, lofty pity, when she said it. Discarding it, and other thrusts from tissue-paper weapons, one single thing remained that he could righteously resent. This was her flat refusal to give credence even to the suggestion that he had tried to meet his obligations. "*Oh, don't be fantastic!—*"

This smarted. Some of his hurts he deserved, but this he did not; and in the sweeping plea for forgiveness he would make to Ann, it would be the reservation, the "but." He would say, "There's just one thing: I *haven't* been as lazy and irresponsible about money matters as you seem to think. Not by a long shot! As a matter of fact——"

He would tell her. He would tell her all about the extra work he had striven to get, the ghost-writing assignment he still had hopes of getting. He would describe his attempts to collect from his numerous debtors. He would announce the completion of "Cabaret Lady."

His mind lingered there. If the story were only *sold*! There was vague dissatisfaction in the thought of saying, "I finished it,"—and then having nothing more to say. It had been finished too long; the wine of accomplishment was flat. To impress Ann, who was always and forever finishing things, he should have been able to add, "—and they bought it." Or at least, "—and the editor says if I'll revise it a little——"

He decided suddenly to go and see the editor. His letter of inquiry about the story had not been answered; he would take a run over there—now—and see what was what. He might as well. It was too soon to go home,

anyway. He had banged the door too hard when he left, to return in less than an hour. "*Infra dig*," he told himself gravely.

Ann wouldn't even be wondering, yet.

He poured the rest of his beer into the foamy glass, and drank it. He thought, "See the editor' is good! I probably won't get past the second assistant office boy." But never mind. He'd try, anyway.

"Got a 'phone book, Harry?" he asked when he paid for his drinks in the room adjoining.

Harry produced an incredibly ancient and tattered one from somewhere underneath the bar.

"Ah!" said Toby, admiring it. "A first edition!"

He was feeling almost blithe. "You certainly do love old things, don't you Harry?" he said. "I've noticed that about you. Take your beer, for instance. *Old?*" He wagged his head, as if in awe. "Hardly a man is now alive who tasted it when it was new. Am I right, Harry?"

"You newspaper fellas," Harry said mournfully. "Always crackin' wise."

Toby found the address he sought, and murmuring it over to memorize it, closed the book.

"I'm off," he said.

Harry called after him: "Say, how about that ticket for the fights?"

"Oh, sure. I won't forget——"

"I'll be seeing you, Harry," Toby said.

§

The editorial offices of the Symposium were on the twentieth floor of an office building in the Forties. The reception room, into which you stepped direct from the elevators, was large and beautiful, dim and imposing.

Toby found himself snatching his hat off with almost guilty haste, as though he had just discovered that he was in church. A quiet room. Thick rugs muffled his footfalls as he crossed it diagonally, headed for the appointment desk in the corner. People were sitting about stiffly, silently, in carved chairs with tall backs, waiting. They might have been there for hours. They had that air.

Presiding behind the desk was a highly appropriate young woman, a disdainful beauty, auburn-haired, gray-eyed. With elbows sheathed in sleek black satin resting on the wood before her, she sat turning a pencil around and around in her fingers. She had long rosy nails, like petals petrified and lacquered, and her marcel wave was four concentric circles around a part, as if a pebble had been dropped in a pool of copper. She belonged to the room. She was, you felt, the inspiration of the decorator who had done it. As well remove the tapestries and paintings from the walls as let this bit of bric-à-brac go out to lunch. . . .

There was a pad on the desk before her, and a telephone at her hand. Toby supplied his name and the object of his visit, and watched these statements scribbled on the pad. Then, from the nearest carved chair, he heard them being transmitted through the telephone to someone—as, indeed, did everyone else in the room.

"McLean," said the young woman's cool clear voice. "M-c-L-e-a-n. About a story he sent in five weeks ago."

It was rather distressing. Toby sat bent forward, his forearms on his knees, his eyes much interested in what his fingers were doing to his hat-brim. In this moment he perceived that he was being a pest. He knew it. All these other people knew it.

The young woman hung up the receiver and pushed the telephone to one side. Lightly she pressed her copper hair

close to one cheek with the tips of three fingers. "If you'll wait," she remarked to Toby.

He waited. He recovered his equanimity, the limelight having shifted to a newcomer who bore a mammoth thin thing in paper wrappings, evidently a drawing, and who with enviable familiarity and ease, addressed the goddess at the desk as "Gert." Toby relaxed against his chair and glanced about him. Four people waiting. A college-looking girl in a green felt hat and woolen stockings, probably wanting a job. ("I majored in English——"). A lady of uncertain age with very large ankles, balancing a portfolio on a slippery mink lap. ("I have a few little poems here——"). A timid troubled small man with red-rimmed peering eyes. ("I know your time is valuable, but if you could spare a *minute*——"). The fourth person was more difficult to classify, since an outspread newspaper concealed all of him but the sharp-creased trouser-legs and the dark gray spats and the dull black shoes. Toby decided, for no particular reason, that this was an authors' agent.

Having solved these human equations to his satisfaction, he lit a cigarette and moved to a seat beside a table, where there were ash trays. Here, under a lamp, lay the January issues of the several magazines published by this corporation, each in a special lettered leather cover of its own. He picked up the Symposium and leafed through it slowly. Stories by the usual people. The Big Names. "I've got a crust," he thought. "Trying to crash in here!" But there were names he didn't know. One or two. . . .

He closed the magazine, and put it back and just sat. The room was not so very quiet now. People came and went, through two heavy doors that gave quick glimpses of corridors beyond, and other doors. The man with

the drawing had disappeared within. A girl in a smocked navy-blue silk dress had emerged and smiled at the lady of uncertain age, saying, "He can see you now, Miss Pease," and Miss Pease's sturdy ankles had carried her, portfolio and mink and all, inside. A whistling pimpled youth had come out, dangling galley proofs in his hand. A man with dramatic snow-white hair and a youngish sunburned face had stepped from an elevator and gone inside, not stopping at the desk, barely nodding to the goddess. Two stenographers in hats and coats had rung for a down-going elevator and were waiting under a red light, pulling their gloves on. Typewriters and adding machines and telephone bells could be heard, remotely. On floors higher than this one, people were mailing many letters; every few seconds the swift white flashes of envelopes sped, whispering, down the perpendicular narrow chute of glass.

Toby stirred restlessly. He crooked his elbow to uncover his wristwatch, but his wrist was bare, and he remembered that he had left the watch on the chiffonier at home, having been in too great a hurry to strap it on. It must be half past one, or later. He had been here at least a quarter of an hour. He hated to wait. Like all men who are not very busy, he resented the infringement on his time. He glanced appealingly toward the goddess. She was reading a book. He considered approaching her again and telling her that he had an appointment somewhere else in ten more minutes. He decided against it. She would probably merely nod, saying, "Sorry."

He tilted his head against the chair and regarded with slanting vision the buckled patent leather pumps of a girl who had just arrived and who was occupying a neighboring chair. The girl's ankles were crossed, and the sole

of one new shoe was visible; the price mark was still stuck in the curve under the thin high heel. Idly he tried to make out what the figure was. . . . It occurred to him that he might utilise this waiting time by planning his drive for funds for Ann's reimbursement. The fifteen hundred dollars he now owed was a new and different and infinitely more important fifteen hundred dollars; it was the value of his self-respect. He must have it. He must go after it all over again, redoubling his efforts. He ought to be thinking about it, making plans.

"Well," he thought, "this story of mine is worth a couple of hundred dollars—if not to this outfit, to some other. And I can get the office to give me a month's pay in advance—there's five hundred more—five and two is seven—that's half of it, right there!——"

Heartening reflections. Sufficient, for the present. Feeling pleased, feeling that it was all going to be quite easy, he lit another cigarette and fell to wondering how women ever walked on heels like those. . . .

His wait ended abruptly. One of the two heavy doors opened again, it flew open, with an effect of great hurry and energy combined, and there appeared a lady with brown taut hair and a dark green tailored suit, who said audibly to the goddess as she shot across the threshold, "Where is he?"

The goddess indicated Toby. Disposing of his cigarette, he rose to meet "Mr. Williard's assistant." She was, she added, Miss Holmes. A busy lady; this she did not add, nor did she need to. Toby thought he had never seen such a personification of alacrity, of vitality—of *speed*. Miss Holmes was a hare in a world of tortoises. She moved so much more fleetly than ordinary people as to make them seem hesitant and halt; and average speech, compared with her speech, drawled. . . .

"Will you come this way?" she said, and immediately was off; Toby, at a brisk clip, following.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," she threw back over her shoulder.

"Quite all right," he murmured after her.

At the door he caught up, and would have held it open for her; but Miss Holmes' hand beat his to the knob, her shoulder pushed the panel. They were inside, hustling down a corridor, dodging the people they met, zigzagging wildly, "—like," Toby thought, "two Fords in a movie." He was amused. His mind was describing this flight for the eventual edification of Ann. "So fast the wind whistled in my ears—and you could've played cards on my coat-tail——"

He was a little excited too. Expectant. For surely he was about to hear something favorable? They wouldn't, surely, bring you this far to say, "Here, young man, is your story. No reflection on the merits of the manuscript is implied. . . ."

Miss Holmes presented her profile again for an instant. She had an aquiline nose and a thin mouth, like a pale pink piping. "We'll go in my office," she said. "Mr. Williard is talking to somebody. He'll be tied up for some time, I'm afraid.

"In here," she added.

Her office was small and bright, and cluttered astonishingly with letters, with manuscripts in bunches, with old magazines in heaps; with proofs and memoranda, dummies and files. A straw-haired stenographer toiling at a typewriting desk near the window presented a bent tan crêpe-de-chine back to the room. On the walls there were framed originals of illustrations and covers, and two or three autographed photographs of famous contributors. Miss Holmes closed the door, and slid into

the swivel chair that cowered before the mass of miscellany on the desk. She nodded at the chair opposite. "Sit down, Mr.—'McLeen?' Or 'McLane?'"

Toby echoed the second pronunciation. He sat down, and finding Miss Holmes' eyes watching him, smiled. She was nice. A nice old girl with very bright brown eyes that sized him up, and approved him. "We click," he thought, approving her. They would get along.

Miss Holmes produced a round tin can of cigarettes and pushed it across to him. "Smoke?"

"Thanks."

"You see this desk," its owner said, thumbing a briquet. The cigarette between her lips wagged with each syllable. Her eyes surveyed the desk. "Please take a good look at it," she said. "It explains much."

She halted long enough to apply the flame of her cigarette; to assure herself that Toby had a light; to shut the lighter. Then, leaning on her folded arms, she began in earnest:

"I wrote you a letter only this morning, Mr. McLean. We liked your story——"

Here Miss Holmes interrupted herself to say, "*Ptth!*" in an audible forthright attempt to dislodge a bit of tobacco from the tip of her tongue. This failing, she removed the fleck with thumb and forefinger, and continued, "You have an extra copy at home, of course."

"Umm," Toby agreed inattentively. His eyes were shining. "You really *like* it?"

She nodded matter-of-factly. "Very much. Mr. Williard was particularly enthusiastic about it. I'm sorry he's so busy today—he wanted to talk to you. He's been away," Miss Holmes said parenthetically. "Which accounts in part for our delay in reporting on the manu-

script. It needed his o. k., you see. He got back only last week, and a few days ago he dictated a letter——

"Isabel?" Miss Holmes dropped backward in the swivel chair and addressed the stenographer over her shoulder. "Have you got that letter to Mr. McLean—that first one?"

The letter, typewritten and signed, on a sheet of uncreased stationery, was found by Isabel with an ease that, in view of the confusion, seemed miraculous.

"Read it," said Miss Holmes, handing it over.

Toby read:

Mr. Toby McLean,
Sports Department,
New York STAR,
New York City.

Dear Mr. McLean:—

Enclosed you will find our check for five hundred (\$500.00) dollars in full payment for the first American and Canadian serial rights to your story, "Cabaret Lady."

We think it an excellent piece of work. By all means let us have a chance at something else.

Cordially yours,

Robert K. Williard,
Editor-in-chief.

He did not have to read it a second time. It was memorized, photographed on his mental lens, in the single reading; he could have made a duplicate of it, exact as a carbon copy, even to the initials, RKW:IB, in the lower corner. Yet he did not lift his eyes immediately. It was good to look at. ". . . five hundred (\$500.00). . . ." *That.* That in particular.

He looked hard at it. "Sa-ay!" he heard himself breathe exultantly. He felt himself beginning to grin, the grin spreading and stretching, as if his joy had fingers that pulled his cheeks. He was a little ashamed of this uncontrollable facial antic, which probably seemed to Miss Holmes extremely silly. He glanced up diffidently. Miss Holmes was smiling too, and her smile was sympathetic, indulgent, warm.

"Something tells me," she said, "that this is your first story!"

He acknowledged it, beaming. "Say," he said ingenuously, "Can I keep this?" He tapped the letter.

"Why not? It belongs to you."

"I'll have to frame it," Toby said, "like a diploma."

Miss Holmes watched him fold it. "It wasn't mailed," she remarked, "for a reason which it now becomes my painful duty to explain. Painful, because humiliating to me. The fact is, Mr. McLean, we've mislaid your manuscript!"

"You've——?"

Miss Holmes nodded. "Lost it. We can't find it anywhere. It was on this desk——" She gave the desk a scowl of fierce antipathy. "Right *here*," she said, slapping a mound of papers with her palm. "Right on top. I remember perfectly, and so does Isabel. It was here the afternoon before Mr. Williard dictated that letter. Now, whether somebody knocked it off without noticing—and the scrubwoman found it that night on the floor and thought it was meant for the wastebasket—I don't know. I imagine," said Miss Holmes, "that that's what happened. The woman swears not—but of course she would. Anyway, it's gone."

Toby stared at her blankly. His mind felt blank. There was only one thing in his mind: a line of type he

had seen a few minutes ago, while he was waiting. "*The SYMPOSIUM assumes no responsibility whatever for unsolicited manuscripts*" . . .

Miss Holmes was talking on. "Unpardonable carelessness," she said. "I'm distressed about it. Such a thing has never happened before in the history of this office, so far as I know. But fortunately there's no great harm done! You'll just bring us your other copy——"

She stopped. His face had stopped her. She eyed him sharply, her brows together, pinned together by sudden agitation. "You said you had another copy?"

Toby inclined his head. "I know I did. I—wasn't thinking."

His eyelids flickered; fell, covering his eyes. His thumb and first finger plucked at the edge of the folded letter. "I haven't," he said with difficulty. "That was the only copy. The original. It was pretty clear, so—I just sent it in."

"Oh, my goodness," Miss Holmes cried, "you *didn't*! I mean——"

Toby nodded. He knew what she meant. It was incredible to her that he had taken such a risk; and now it was incredible to him. Newspaper man's trick. . . . "You see," he said, so Miss Holmes would not think him utterly insane, "I'm not used to carbons, working on a newspaper. I never thought."

"It's my fault," he added. All his bitterness was for himself. It was his fault. His folly. His appalling stupidity.

"*The SYMPOSIUM assumes no responsibility whatever. . . .*"

Of the rest of his interview with Miss Holmes, he never afterward remembered much, save that she had been kind, she had seemed to feel very badly. He remembered her

saying, "I could *bawl*. I could." And looking as if she might. He remembered that she declared she would search for the manuscript again, she would scour the place, she would find it! It couldn't be lost, she insisted now. It must be somewhere.

"It'll turn up," she kept assuring him.

He smiled optimistically, for her sake. "Sure it will." But it wouldn't. He knew.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

"**D**ID you ever hear of such a tough break," he asked Ann, "in all your *life*?"

As vigorously as a head can be shaken when it rests close in the curve of an arm, Ann shook her head. "Never," she said, "I never did." And she stormed, "That Miss whatever-her-name-is ought to be fired!"

Their quarrel was forgotten. They had not had to patch it up, in the usual sense of the phrase. Each had forgiven the other for everything before Toby came home. "Oh," Ann had breathed in immense relief, the minute she saw him, "I'm so glad you're here! Oh, Toby, darling, I'm *so sorry*——"

He had understood her, contradictory though the cry was. He had taken her in his arms; and she was there still. He needed her there. This was what he had come straight home for: to be forgiven—that first, of course; and then to hold Ann in his arms, and tell her what had befallen him, and hear her exclaim, and sputter, and grieve aloud.

She was so satisfactory, Ann. For just as long as he wanted her to be indignant for him, she was indignant. "I think it's an outrage! They should pay you the five hundred dollars *anyway*! But Toby, they should! You're not to blame that your story's lost—if it is lost—are you? Then why in the world should it cost *you* five hundred dollars?"

When he smiled at her, and patted her cheek, gently pointing out flaws in her argument, he wished her to note

how reasonable he was, how sensible, and with what fortitude he bore this very real misfortune. And Ann did note these things, and she was properly admiring. "You're so *game* about it, Toby! Saying it was your own fault—I don't see how you can take it so calmly! I couldn't, I know. I'd be wanting to *sue* the darned old magazine!"

Perhaps she overdid it a little; remorse for the things she had said two hours before was riding her hard. You're marvelous," she told him, because she had told him something quite different. "Imagine having written a story good enough for the Symposium to *want* to buy! Think what it means! It means," explained Ann with great earnestness, "that you *can*. If you did it once, you can do it again. And you will!" And she insisted that he would, because, two troubled hours ago, she had maintained that he would never do anything. . . .

And presently, clairvoyantly, she said, "Let's have a highball. Shall we? I feel just like one, don't you?"

Drinking his highball, which Ann had mixed herself and made quite strong (in token that she wasn't worrying really), Toby became gradually more philosophical, more sanguine; inclined to look upon, and able to see, the brighter side. The story had been *good*; that was the thing to think about. And just as Ann said, he could write others. He had it in him. Any time he wanted to, he could sit down at a typewriter and bat out a first-class story worth five hundred dollars—or even more! To know that, to have proved that hitherto hypothetical point, was worth this first five hundred. It was worth any amount. It was *confidence*.

He began to perceive that his loss, compared with his gain, was as nothing. He said to Ann, "The more I think about it, the more I think it's all to the merry! Two things I've been needing—a pat on the back, and

a kick in the pants—and I got 'em both at once! Now I'm all set. I can get busy."

And perhaps he might have, if the thing that happened later had not happened. Fate was reserving the insupportable blow until the last.

He had an hour's respite. This high-hearted hour, full of contentment; full of new hope, and of old intimacy. He would never forget it. He would remember, always, little trivial things about it. The firelight. The wind beyond the windows. The warmth and snugness of the studio. The clock on the mantel, that had stopped at twenty-one minutes past twelve. The new pajamas Ann had on, of lavender brocaded silk, with a high choker collar and gold buttons on the left shoulder. "‘Portrait of a Gilded Child’ bought these," Ann said. "And a new portable, and your Christmas present besides. . . ."

He would remember incidents: Ann scrubbing at his cheek with a corner of his handkerchief, to remove a trace of red her lips had left there. The burning cigarette that one of them dropped, that disappeared; their frantic burrowing under the cushions of the divan. The telephone ringing, and a woman's voice saying, "Is this the Busy Bee? I want a pound of unsalted butter——" Toby solemnly being the Busy Bee, accepting the order. "Yes, ma'am. And a can of small French peas, yes, ma'am. And what else?"

They were very cheerful, all that hour. Everything was beautifully all right. They were close together, who had been apart; there was no such thing as trouble now. Their quarrel had cleared an atmosphere that now they realized had been surcharged, unnatural, for many days. Toby, preoccupied with worries which he had chosen to keep to himself, had been morose and restive. Ann had been puzzled and hurt. Their relief was tremendous.

Their eyes continually rejoiced: "That's all *over* with!" Rather like people who have been separated in fact, they kept thinking of things to tell each other, casual bits of news they had stored up.

"Say, that reminds me: guess who was in the office the other day——"

"Oh, I've been meaning to ask you! Did you hear about Joe Blake?——"

They talked and talked. Their highballs sank in their glasses, until Toby's was gone and Ann's was half gone; then Ann mixed another for Toby, and put a new piece of ice in her own. While she was in the kitchen, chipping the ice—in the ineffectual timid feminine fashion, getting small wet splinters up her sleeve—Toby replenished the fire in the studio fireplace until it was boisterous, until it popped and crackled, having a mood like his. He started the victrola, and Ann, returning, found him clogging, expertly, on a patch of bare floor.

"I feel great," he told her.

"So do I!"

He took the tall cold glasses out of her hands and set them down, and seizing her, danced a mad and dizzying foxtrot. They were breathless when the record stopped. The drinks were good. They settled down on the divan again, facing each other, each with a shoulder against the back. Ann sat like a little girl, one leg tucked under her, and her free hand resting on a blond-silk ankle. They sipped gratefully, and talked again, and now and then in a meditative fashion shook their glasses just a little to click the ice. . . .

"I think I'll go back on the wagon," Toby said presently, after a pause.

"Do you want to?"

He shrugged. "It's better, isn't it? I mean, we get

along better—— You're happier when I'm not drinking. Of course."

Ann said, "I don't mind your drinking moderately——"

But they both knew that it was easier for him not to drink at all.

"I'll get more work done," Toby said, when another pause had fallen. "I've got to write three short stories, don't forget. One, two, three——" He snapped his fingers rapidly thrice, "—like that."

"Why three, exactly?"

"Speaking as an optimist!" he explained good-humor-edly. "Three stories at five hundred each is fifteen hundred dollars. But of course it may turn out to be *fifteen* stories at a *hundred* each. Or thirty at fifty each. Or—— but never mind. We won't go into that."

Ann reached over and tucked her hand in his. "Toby."

"Present."

"*Please*," said Ann.

"Please what?"

"Please forget about——about the fifteen hundred. What's mine is yours, don't you know it?"

Toby's eyes smiled lazily, teasingly, into her serious ones. He lifted the hand that he held and kissed the palm of it, and bit the tip of the smallest finger a little; then he brought the hand down to the cushion and covered it over with his hand again.

"And as I was saying," he said conversationally, "after Cain slew Abel, there must have been only Adam and Eve and Cain——"

§

At four they were hungry; neither of them had had any lunch, and the highballs had sharpened their appetites. Missouri was gone for the day. They invaded the

kitchen, putting their cigarettes down on the edges of a wooden shelf and a window sill and forgetting about them; tying on aprons, squatting before the icebox, side by side, and peering in.

"Do you see anything?" said Toby rather wistfully. "Except White Rock and gingerale? And ketchup and syrup?"

"Eggs——"

"Ah!"

"A whole dozen," said Ann. "We'll scramble them, shall we? Or shall we make an omelet?"

"*Can* we make an omelet?"

"I could try."

"We'll scramble them," Toby decided. "Any bacon?"

There was bacon. Toby cut thick slices of bread for toast for himself and thin slices, without the crusts, for toast for Ann. There was orange marmalade, and Ann made coffee. The lunch would be, as she said, "break-fastish;" but they could have crackers and cheese at the end if they wished.

The telephone rang while Toby, who quite fancied himself as a scrambler of eggs, was dumping the beaten mixture from a large yellow bowl into a hot and buttery frying pan.

"You answer it, will you?" he said to Ann.

He stood at the stove, holding a fork in readiness over the frying pan. Ann had left the door to the studio open. "Hello?" he heard her say. "Yes. Oh, hello, Chris!"

"Hanley," Toby thought idly. That meant that the call was for him—or would be when Ann and Chris had exchanged greetings. In the meantime, the mixture in the frying pan was beginning to congeal around the edge. Deftly he ran the fork around.

"Oh, I'm fine," Ann was saying. "How are you?"

"I haven't seen you for an age," she said.

Toby only half listened. His interest in these casual amenities was slight; and the eggs were requiring more and more attention. He heard Ann say, "Oh, did you? Where?" And after a moment he heard her say, "Oh. Why—yes." But he gave no thought to either observation; nor did he, until afterward, remark the fact that Ann's voice had gone suddenly queerly flat.

"But—where were you?" she said. "I didn't see you."

"Hey, the bacon's burning!" Toby shouted.

Which was true. Between the bacon and the eggs, he caught no more of the conversation. There could not have been a great deal more. While he sought to keep the fork in motion in the frying pan with one hand and to pull hot crisps of fat out of the broiler with the other, Ann appeared.

"It's Chris," she said. "He wants to talk to you. Here, I'll do that."

She became exceedingly busy. Toby did not see her face.

Wiping his hands on Missouri's white apron, which was tied around his neck like a monstrous bib, he strolled to the telephone.

"Sir?" he said.

"Hullo," said Hanley. "Is it you?"

"No."

"Good!"

They spoke merrily of many matters. When, finally, Toby hooked up the receiver, Ann was setting the card table in the studio.

"Everything ready?"

She nodded.

"How're the eggs, all right?"

"I guess so."

"Chris wants me to do his bike-race story tonight," said Toby, removing his apron. "He's got a heavy date with a light lady."

Ann, arranging knives and forks, said: "Really?"

Toby went to the kitchen to dispose of the apron and to see for himself how the eggs were. "Shall I bring these things in?" he called through the doorway.

"If you want to."

He emerged with two hot yellow plates in a pinch of towel in his left hand and coffee cups and saucers in his right. Ann's back was toward him. She was filling two goblets with water from a hammered silver pitcher.

Her voice was noncommittal. "Did Chris mention having seen me?"

"No," said Toby.

"Ouch, damn it!" he said, for the plates were very hot indeed. He slid them onto the table, and wagged the fingers that had held them. "*Whew!* Careful! Those plates are the original hinges of Hades."

Ann glanced at his fingers. She did not speak.

Out of politeness, rather than from curiosity, Toby presently resumed: "What was this about Chris seeing you?"

"He says he did," Ann answered. "I didn't see him."

"How come?"

Her shoulders lifted slightly, and fell. "I don't know. I guess I wasn't there."

Her profile was inscrutable. She bent over the table, patting with a napkin some water she had spilled on the linen cloth. Toby thought, "What's she talking about? What is this?" He comprehended only that it was danger.

He said, "You weren't where? I don't get you."

Ann straightened, and confronted him. "Chris pulled

a bone, I'm afraid," she said quietly. "He didn't mean to, and he doesn't know he did, because I—pretended." She looked straight at Toby. "I pretended I was the girl in the taxi with you—leaving the curb in front of the Jungle Club about three this morning, just as he pulled up in another taxi——"

"Oh, that!" Toby interrupted quick-wittedly. Rashly. He smiled: "You know who that was? There was another fellow in the taxi, too—didn't Chris tell you? He's a kid I know from Columbia—manager of the track team, I've met him several times—and the girl was his girl. I forget her name."

He wrinkled his forehead in the effect of an effort to remember. "'Lawson', or 'Lawton'——"

"Or 'Randolph,'" suggested Ann. "Mightn't it have been that?"

Their eyes met. Toby, for all the pounding of his heart, knew that his face was imperturbable, bland, admitting nothing. "'Randolph?'" he repeated. Then, "Oh, you mean Puff Randolph?" He laughed, and shook his head. "No. Don't worry. It wasn't she."

Still smiling, he looked again at Ann. The oftener he returned that cryptic gaze, the better, he felt. To return it was to watch it. . . .

"What made you think it was Puff?" he asked.

He had to find out. But there was no note of anxiety in his tone; merely a passing inquisitiveness and a faint indulgent amusement, as if he were going to add, "—you funny child!"

Ann said, "I don't think. I know it was."

"Oh, really?" His smile was ironical. "Feminine intuition, perhaps."

"Perhaps," said Ann. "Call it that."

She still held the napkin. Now, in the tiny silence, she tossed it listlessly to the table nearby. "I know when you're lying," she said in the same dispassionate voice. "At least—I know this time."

Her eyes were evading his now, straying beyond him. "It's too *pat*," she said quite simply. "You lie too well. I don't believe you."

Her glance came back. "Maybe not so well," she contradicted herself. "You seem to've forgotten that last night on the phone, and again today, you told me you were at Andreani's. Now it's the Jungle Club. And you told me you were with some of the crowd who're working on the bike race. Now it's the manager of the track team from Columbia and his girl."

"I can explain that——" Toby began.

"Oh," said Ann, "*doubtless!*——"

Her sudden savage vehemence struck them both momentarily dumb. Startled, staring unblinking, they faced each other. Toby's lips were still parted for speech; he remembered, and closed them, and heard his teeth click and felt his jaw harden. He remembered that the thing to say—coldly, indifferently—was, "Oh, very well, then. Have it your own way." He said this, with an effort. He was tired. He was sick in his very soul of sham and falsehood. Suddenly now he thought, "To hell with it." It was useless anyway; and stupid and degrading. He would tell the truth, and take what came.

He said evenly to Ann, "I'm sorry. You're right, I was lying. Or trying to. It was Puff Randolph."

He said, "This is how it happened——"

But Ann would not listen. She said that she didn't want to hear any more; that two versions, both of them made of whole cloth, were "*plenty!*" She cried out that no matter what he said—now—she would not believe him;

she would never again believe anything he told her. She was beside herself, her face distorted, her eyes blazing—strange, unrecognizable: not Ann's eyes. Nothing could calm her, nothing, in this moment, could make her sane. Toby said, "Ann, if you'll *listen*——" And she gave a little scream and clapped her hands over her ears. When he moved toward her, thinking to take the hands and hold them and force her to listen, she wheeled and ran from him, toward the steps to the bedroom. He caught her half way, and she struggled, gasping, "Let *go*! You let *go* of me!" When he did not obey, she sank her teeth into his wrist.

The pain was intense for an instant, and Toby, who had been merely grim, became himself enraged. "You little devil!" he said, and picked her up in his arms, not gently, and dropped her into an armchair two strides away. He stood over her, fists on his hips. "Now, damn it," he said, "you're *going* to listen! Believe it or not, you're going to hear what I've got to say."

Ann, sitting quietly as she had fallen, smiled a very little curling smile. "All right," she said. She was cool now, and beyond words, contemptuous of him. She said, "Go ahead. Only—be as quick as possible, will you please? I seem to be anxious for you to get through, and get out of—my apartment."

She had stressed it. "*My* apartment." In the two-letter word there was the sum of all their altercation of the morning; the word dismissed every gentle thing they had said in the interim. Spoken as Ann spoke it, remindingly, arrogantly, it was a lash that whipped all thought of what he would have told her from Toby's mind. He stood looking at her, while the slow red crept up his face to the roots of his hair. He did not know it, but

his eyes held curiosity, and a certain odd enlightenment, looking at her. He was thinking, "*God*, how mad she is!" To have brought up that money thing again, to have flayed that raw; wanting as badly as that to be sure of his wincing. . . .

Ann's eyes shifted first. But the little mocking smile remained on her lips, and did not waver. "After all——" she said, and made a gesture with hands and shoulders. "It *is* my apartment, isn't it?"

He nodded. "Yes. Of course. You've paid for it."

Somehow his concise direct acquiescence, level-voiced, destroyed Ann's artificial self-control. She sat erect in her chair, her eyes blazing again, her body shaking with the tension of her fury. "Then how many times must I tell you I want you to *leave*?"

There was an instant while their glances locked. Then Toby inclined his head slightly. "Another time will not be necessary," he said.

At the door, her voice stopped him. He listened, his hand on the knob, not turning his head. He heard Ann say that she was going to California "—as soon as I can get a reservation." Still he did not turn his head. She wouldn't go. This was her temper speaking.

"There are reasons why I should go now," said Ann, "as you know. And there's no reason why I shouldn't—any more."

Toby said, "None whatever."

He left her apartment, noiselessly closing the door.

Ann got a reservation on the Century the next morning. She was gone two hours before Shorty Ross shook Toby by the shoulder, saying, "Hey, wake up, you big souse! You gotta get off that couch. My sainted aunt

will be here in a minute." . . . When Toby called her office, she had been gone almost all day. She was on her way to California, for six weeks; and if she was sorry, if she very nearly turned back at Chicago, he did not know it. He knew only that she was gone. Ann was gone. Everything was gone away from him.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

SHORTY lived in a small hotel not far from Times Square, on a side street. He had what the management called a suite of three rooms: a living room; a bedroom that was really an alcove off the living room; and a bath. He had always lived there—which is to say that ever since his arrival in New York from Columbus, Ohio, four or five years ago, he had. The hotel had attracted him first because he had heard that it housed many show girls. This was still a feature. Shorty liked show girls—though the Idea of them was no longer the mental dazzle it once had been.

He had moved several times, within the hotel. His earliest room had been a very dim and little single one, on a court. It had had one window, through which it was possible to watch what went on in the kitchen of a well-known restaurant in the next street. . . . According to Shorty, his habit of wiping forks and spoons on his napkin before attacking his food dated from this era. He also insisted that his lack of stature was attributable directly to certain observations made by him via the window. His melancholy story was that he didn't eat for a year, and it stunted his growth. "Up till then," he was wont to say wistfully, "I was coming along quite well."

He had been, at the time, a staff man on the *Bulletin*, Toby's old paper. When he went over to the *Gazette*, at a slightly larger salary, he moved to a more spacious room that had two windows and a soothing view of the

side of a cinema house. A year later he achieved a front room with a bath, having become a sports writer at eighty dollars a week. As soon as he reached one hundred and twenty-five, he took the suite.

He could have moved twice since then; he had had two raises in three years; but he was satisfied. This was good enough. Indeed, some things about it were perfect. The big old-fashioned bay window, for instance. Where would you find another bay window like that one? Shorty asked you where.

Below the window, seven floors below, was Forty-fifth Street. A street of theatres, of small theatrical hotels, of eating places, of night clubs; of little shops where wigs were sold, and costumes for the stage or masquerade were sold or rented, and gowns were on display, and make-up kits, and lingerie (rose Georgette crepe trimmed with black lace and ribbons). A gaudy street. Electric letters glowed above its sidewalks in the evenings, and gentlemen in opera hats helped ladies with corsages to alight from limousines with grace and safety. Thus the bay window was as a season box at a nightly pageant, a Twentieth Century pageant, given to the hoot of horns. Shorty, who was rarely at home of evenings, almost never occupied his box; but he liked having it. He boasted, "You can see the clock on the Paramount Building from here."

He had made the rooms his. Piece by piece the hotel properties had been removed, supplanted by less conventional pieces of his purchasing, so that now only a chifferonier and the carpet and one chair remained of the original furnishings. Shorty's bed was a box spring, covered by day with a darkish cover and headed with several careless colored pillows. His desk was an enormous roll-top, very business-like, very impressive, its pigeonholes crammed

with old bills, receipts, telegrams and letters that somehow, despite their obvious age, looked important.

There was a couch in the living room, a deep one of worn red leather. A second-hand couch; it had once graced the lounge of a club. There were bookshelves which Shorty had had built and lacquered red. He had filled them, but now they were not very full. People never returned Shorty's books. When they found them in their own libraries they thought, "Whose— Oh! Shorty's,"—and with an air of *that's-all-right*, tucked them back in.

There were the walls. These must be mentioned, for nowhere did the rooms forget that they were hotel rooms as they did here. Gone were the wall-paper roses, the pictures of (1) a maiden in a riding habit, patting the neck of a bright brown horse, (2) the signing of the Declaration of Independence. Plain-papered, the walls contained a thick array of photographs, framed for the most part in narrow red frames. Girls' photographs. Athletes' photographs. Fighters crouching ready to fight, ball players brandishing bats. For the maiden in the riding habit, Shorty had substituted Miss Dorothy Knapp of the "Vanities" in part of a leopard skin. Instead of the signing of the Declaration, there was Firpo, caught by the camera in the act of knocking Dempsey through the ropes.

Interspersed with the photographs were various pictures and sketches, including some that could only have come from Paris. Other things in frames were a map of Cabell's mythical land, a dinner menu scribbled with signatures, a cancelled check (Shorty's first pay check: six dollars and fifty cents), and the original of a cartoon by Webster. Miscellaneous ornaments hung on the walls included a blown-up football autographed in ink by the celebrated Four Horsemen of Notre Dame; a girl's gold

slipper; a 1920 Ohio license plate; a circle of champagne corks, in the center of which an abstinence pledge signed by Shorty at the age of eight was tacked; a pair of boxing gloves; and, depending from a wire in a corner, a human skull (called Madam) toward which Shorty gestured in proof of his contention that he had once spent seven weeks in medical school. . . .

In the midst of this museum, behold the owner, solitary, on an evening a few days before Christmas. As has been said, he was seldom at home of evenings; even more rare were the evenings when he was at home alone. This had not happened in he didn't know when, Shorty was thinking. He was feeling pleased. It was a good thing, this staying in once in a while. He should do it often. He would do it often. If he did it often, he would Get Things Done.

The clock on the Paramount Building told him it was not quite eight. The evening stretched ahead of him, long and quiet. Removing his coat and vest and tie, unbuttoning his shirt at the neck and rolling the sleeves above his elbows, exchanging his shoes for comfortable if slightly unmanly slippers, knitted for him by Miss Lydia Ross ("my sainted aunt" to Shorty), he planned the evening. He would pay bills. He would check over his bank statements for November, October and September; they were there in a pigeonhole of his desk, in unopened envelopes. All that off his mind, he would write letters. He owed a great many. "I'm a rotten correspondent," he mused, with the complacency peculiar to that reflection.

There was, for example, his fan letter. He must answer that. He had carried it for weeks in an inside pocket, exhibiting it now and then, saying carelessly, "Here's a funny one I got the other day." . . . Now he must acknowledge it. "On nice stationery," he thought. And

down at the foot of the page, as if he had dictated it, he would type his own initials and then "SD"—which the recipient wouldn't know meant "Shorty Did it." . . .

He would write to his friends, and his relatives, and to one or two of his girls. There was that little brunette in St. Petersburg, the little swimmer. Alma. Alma Richardson. (Or Richards? No. Richardson.) He would write her. He'd be down in St. Pete again pretty soon. . . . A vision of Miss Richardson rose in his mind: her very dark eyes and her *café-au-lait* sunburn, and her slight figure in its one-piece swimming suit of knitted silk with the red and white insignia on the front. She was cute, he recalled. She had a yellow Chrysler roadster. Not a bad idea at all to drop her a line.

He went to his telephone and ordered to be brought up at once some postage stamps and a carton of cigarettes.

"Oh, and listen, Joe," he said to the bell captain, as an afterthought, "send me up a Chronicle-Press, will you, too?"

Ann's story from Hollywood. He had not yet seen it today.

From the telephone he proceeded to the closet in his bedroom, dragging a small chair behind him. This was to stand on. He set it insecurely on the shoes and the soiled laundry that covered the closet floor and, mounting it, he lifted down with care from the highest shelf a long and very dusty cardboard box. The box contained two hundred Christmas cards, with envelopes. He had had the cards made last year, from his own design, and then had neglected to address and sent them. This year they were going to take a ride.

Christmas was Saturday. Wednesday evening now. Bearing the cards to the desk and blowing upon them

cleansingly, Shorty thought he had better attend to them first of all. His schedule for the evening rearranged itself in his mind. Address cards. Make out list of people and presents, that he might do his Christmas shopping early. ("Early" was anything earlier than Friday afternoon). *Then* the bills, *then* the bank statements, *then* the correspondence. The rest of the evening—somehow he thought of it as lasting indefinitely—he would devote to catching up on his reading. "Or," he said to himself, "I may feel like Work."

The cards, first of all. He slipped one from its envelope, and regarded it with a show of satisfaction. It was a caricature of himself, done by Bernstein of his paper. A recognizable caricature, and a happy one, with a grin. Issuing from the grin was a ballon that said, "Hey! Hey!" Simple, but (thought Shorty) neat. Original. In fact, good.

He seated himself at his mammoth desk, and for an interval wrote names and addresses industriously, in a scurrying hand. He had beside him the telephone book of Manhattan and the Bronx, and the one of Brooklyn, Queens and Staten Island, for consultation. He had also an ancient dog-eared address book, more historical than helpful. Into the seat of an armchair drawn up at an adjacent angle he tossed each envelope as he finished it; and he was gratified to discover presently that the box was half empty and the cushion of the chair snowed under.

"Getting along great," he commended himself.

He lit a cigarette and rested a moment; momentarily, he had run out of names. He sat back in his chair and eyed with speculative gaze an envelope he had set apart, on the top of the desk. A chosen envelope, cleaner than most of them. This was for Ann. He had already ad-

dressed it, to Miss Ann Vaughn, Hotel Ambassador, Los Angeles, California. It was set aside because he had thought he might write something on the card. Some special greeting; and something else. . . .

Maybe not, though.

Or should he?

The question diverted his mind from the matter of names and addresses, and he sat idle for an interval, slouched in his chair, considering it. Presently he began to pace about, his head lowered, his hands hooked by the thumbs onto his belt, his shoulders humped. In his preoccupation he passed the red couch several times before the copy of the Chronicle-Press which the boy had brought, lying folded there, insinuated itself into his awareness. He dropped to the couch then, and unfolded the paper and opened it, flinging his arms now apart, now back—thinking fleetingly as he did so that you could snoot the tabloids (Shorty worked for a tabloid) but at least you had to admit they were easy to manage——

Ah! Here. Shorty folded back the paper, and shook and straightened it and smoothed it, and folded it again, and then again, till it was small; a bundle hardly wider than Ann's double-column story, which now he raised and held at reading level. There was the familiar boxed head, "They Tell Me—", with Ann's name in facsimile of her writing underneath. There was the date line: Hollywood, Cal., December 21.—" Which was yesterday.

Shorty read:

"Out at the Balboa lot there is a little nameless lake which wasn't there last week and won't be there a month from now. Sparkling in the well-known sunshine like a sapphire—or I'd better say like a topaz, for it's yellow—this unchartered body of

water lies, at present, in a dent in a field, just north of the studio cafeteria.

"It is this water, squirted into the hollow with a fire hose and replenished of necessity every day, that you will see in almost every scene of 'Get Your Girl!' Lilli La Rue's next starring picture for Balboa. Most of the action of 'Get Your Girl!' takes place aboard a houseboat in various bays and streams in Florida. The little lake is going to be the various bays and streams. You wouldn't believe it, I didn't myself; but it's so.

"I can tell you another. The scenario calls for a terrible storm during which the houseboat is blown out to sea. For that scene and ensuing scenes, the pond will double for the open ocean. The houseboat, which is already built, painted and launched, fitted luxuriously inside and out, has instead of the usual moss and barnacles on the bottom a pair of enormous rockers, that rest on the mud under the shallow water. During the storm the boat is going to rock and pitch as violently as strong men stationed at both ends can make it. Very strong men, and plenty of them. You know those Florida storms!

"Hugo Leighton who is directing 'Get your Girl!' won't thank me for giving his little tricks away. But the whole arrangement for the filming of this picture is such a typically ingenious Hollywood device that the temptation to let you in on it is strong.

"For example: on one shore of the lake a scaffolding has been erected and on the scaffolding a kind of monstrous painted billboard represents horizon, sky and distance. This is for the scenes when the houseboat is out of sight of land. Another section of the shore is to be the water's edge of the cove, with

reeds and rushes growing thickly in it, and Florida foliage in the background. When I was out there this morning the Florida foliage hadn't appeared yet, but the reeds and rushes were arriving at the spot in a succession of wheelbarrows, and workers in overalls and rubber boots were sticking them, spear by spear, into the mud.

"I boarded the houseboat. . . ."

Shorty read to the final paragraph. He was not a movie fan; nevertheless, he had a triple interest in the story, reading it as a fellow reporter, as a friend of Ann's, and—especially—as a friend of Toby's. Well he knew that Toby fed upon this daily column, that it was the only word of Ann that came to him, his only means of knowing what she did and whom she saw, even of knowing how she was. Accordingly Shorty, who loved his friend, read with his mind on Toby; and was relieved when there was nothing that would stab him.

Today there was nothing. The story was noncommittal. Yesterday, writing of a glittering movie party she had attended, relating what one celebrated young Adonis said, and how another guided you in dancing, Ann had sounded buoyant, diverted; callously vivacious and gay. Even to Shorty, who knew better, it had seemed that she *could not* write so, if her heart were heavy. He had thought, "But good God, doesn't she care at *all*?" Thinking of Toby's rather terrible caring.

And there had been her columns written last week on the train. One of them, the one she had filed at Kansas City, had been an admiring interview with young Dwight Knowles, the novelist, who chanced to be a fellow passenger. Knowles was en route to Hollywood also, having a new contract (at a thousand dollars a week) to do

original stories for the screen. This made him copy for Ann; legitimate copy. That she devoted one column to him was not strange—though Shorty thought that she was a little too generous with the bouquets. All that stuff about Knowles looking like one of his own heroes, for instance: was that necessary? Who gave a hoot what he looked like? The guy was supposed to be *read*! Thus Shorty, loyal and disgruntled.

The column on the day following had been about something else, but it had contained a paragraph on Dwight Knowles at the end. Even this was understandable. Ann was naturally finding it difficult to fill her allotted space with cinema notes during a transcontinental trip. For this particular column, having said all she could think of to say on the subject at hand, she had needed a stick or two more; and casting about in her mind for material, she had hit upon the prediction made by Knowles to her about the "talkie" movies. Fair enough! What Shorty deplored was her reference to the observation platform, where, it appeared, the illustrious young man had voiced his remark "last evening after dinner."

Toby's best friend thought that Ann might have left that out.

Then, the next day, Dwight Knowles had taken over the column. Under brief introductory lines by the columnist, he had written a light and facile, casually brilliant piece for her, "—because," he explained in print, "she's reading galley proofs for me." . . . Shorty, at this, had become enormously perturbed. The mutual liking, the *camaraderie*, between Ann and Knowles that it implied, implied in turn more and longer tête-à-têtes on the four-day train than he thought Ann had any business to be having. "Let alone writing home about!" fumed Shorty.

He was annoyed with Ann. He would very much like to give her a thorough paternal shaking, saying among other things, "What're you trying to do—drive Toby *crazy*?" At the same time, he was obliged to acknowledge privately that the column done by Dwight Knowles was a good stunt from a journalistic standpoint. It was also considerable of a gift to Ann, if you wanted to look at it that way. Reckoned at a dollar a word, or whatever Knowles got for his stuff, it was munificent. Shorty grunted, "Why not a platinum-diamond bracelet and be done with it!"

This had been days ago; but the friendship continued to haunt his mind, it was still a worry and a threat. The end of the journey had not ended it, because there they were. Ann in the Hotel Ambassador. Knowles in one of the several famous bungalows that constitute the Hotel Ambassador's annex. Ann's second story from Hollywood had placed him there. "And I hope," Shorty thought earnestly, "it caves in on him."

The effect of all this on Toby was a thing to be sensed and seen. He said nothing. To date he had not mentioned Dwight Knowles' name in Shorty's hearing, nor made a single comment on the columns, any of them. Shorty wished he would. Often these days he led their conversations to a point where Toby might say something, anything, that could be promptly and vociferously refuted; ridiculed. Shorty longed to argue, "Oh, don't be an ass! She's only trying to make you jealous—can't you see that?" He had even rehearsed the argument, alone in his rooms. "Don't fool yourself, boy. She isn't enjoying herself. Not *any*! She's just putting up a brave front, that's the whole thing."

But without the comment, the retort was worse than silence. And Toby had not made a verbal comment. He

wasn't talking anyway, nowadays, Shorty reflected. He hardly ever said much. He just drank. . . .

Lolling on the red couch in an attitude that, for all the unease of his mind, was a comfortable one, Toby's perennial comrade and champion thought upon these things. He had tossed the Chronicle-Press aside, and his fingers were locked behind his neck, against a cushion. His brown eyes brooded toward the ceiling. He scowled. He was thinking that Ann didn't realize what she was doing to Toby; that she should be told. He was thinking, "But I can't." He was thinking unhappily. "Can I?"

Supposing he wrote her. What would he say, exactly? "Dear Ann: I know it isn't any of my business, but——" But what? It *wasn't* any of his business; there was no getting past that fact. And the two whose business it was wouldn't thank him, either of them, for interposing. "He'd be very likely to do more harm than good."

"But they're such *fools!*" Shorty groaned in his helplessness. "The whole thing's so absolutely dumb!" . . .

Shorty saw. He knew what had caused the breach, and how it could be healed—how readily, with a single explanation. The night Toby told him why Ann had gone away, the black night of the day of her departure, he had exclaimed, "But that's nothing!" in immense, short-lived relief. All Toby had to do was write (or telegraph) to Ann the truth she had refused to let him utter. It was, Shorty thought, as simple as that.

He still thought so. But not then, and not since, had he by logic or by oaths succeeded in persuading Toby to put pen to paper. Toby said, "She wouldn't read it." He said, "It wouldn't be any use." He said, "I won't bother her." He said, "When I can send her a check in full for all the money I owe her, then I'll write. But not

till then." He said wearily at last, "Oh, lay off, will you, Shorty? You don't *know*."

Shorty thought, "Well. I know one thing, anyway." That thing was several things in one—namely: that Toby was drinking his head off; that if it were not for his friends he would be in grave danger of losing his job; that he had already, through his failure to appear at the managing editor's office at a given hour on a given day, lost the ghost-writing assignment he had wanted, that might have been his whole salvation; and, in brief, that it was surely up to *somebody* to do *something*.

Reaching this conclusion for the third time in ten minutes and the hundred-and-third time in the past ten days, Shorty, with his lips set and his forehead corrugated, left the red couch, returned determinedly to the desk, and seated himself with a thump in the chair before it. Once there, he swept the box of cards and the bottle of ink and the pen to one side, out of his way, and replaced them with his typewriter. He inserted a piece of paper and wrote, "Dear Ann." He looked at it.

He didn't like it. He pulled the paper out and rolled a fresh sheet in and wrote, "Listen, baby," semi-colon. (Better). He continued, "There's something I think I ough"——

He tore that out.

On the third piece of paper he wrote, "Listen, baby; I'm going to talk to you like a Dutch uncle"——

On the fourth he typed, "First thing I want to say is, Toby doesn't know I'm writi"——

The eighth or ninth attempt began, "Dear Ann: I know it isn't any of my business"——

He gave up, finally. Swearing, he pushed the typewriter away, and gathered the spoiled pages into a sheaf and ripped them across, and fitted the halves together

and ripped them across. . . . It wouldn't do. He couldn't do it. Who was *he*, to go writing Ann? Thing to do was get after Toby, again tomorrow.

He did this. Toby said, "No." He said, "It wouldn't be any use." He said, "I haven't got the money, have I? Well, then." He said impatiently at last, "Oh, forget it, will you? For God's *sake*, Shorty! There's no use talking. You don't understand."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

ANN had taken most of her pretty dresses away with her. But she had left a few hanging in her closet, from the rod. There was the yellow evening dress with the pompon of tulle on the shoulder: that hung close to the wall, on the right hand side. Between it and the little blue tailored suit there was space for a dozen dresses. Then, so close to the suit that they touched, an unidentifiable black chiffon slip. Then the green jersey sport dress, and the tan silk with the brown suede collar and cuffs that Ann had worn that day at the game at Princeton. Then four other dresses, marching single file ahead of it, small and straight like Ann, to the left wall.

On the shelves there were various soft little hats and a black fox fur, a rather worn one. Odds and ends—a white linen smock, a gauzy stocking without a mate, a narrow green crêpe-de-chine belt with a jade buckle, a chiffon nightgown—depended from four of the many brass hooks around the walls. Some of the pockets of the shoe bag nailed inside the closet door were empty and gaping, distended from habit. The rest exhibited high heels, in pairs. A pair of snakeskin heels. A pair of black patent leather heels. A pair of rhinestone heels, with a few stones missing.

When Ann first went away, Toby often stared into this closet, hovering motionless for minutes in the doorway. But lately he had locked it up. The fascination that it had for him was masochistic, and unnecessarily cruel. To be reminded of Ann's dearness, and of her

loss, he need only glance about him. The apartment was full of her. The room where he slept and the room where, spasmodically, he tried to work—these were full of her absence. The minute he entered the place at night, the rooms and the things that were in them cried out to him, "Gone. Not here. Not anywhere here." And the echo was silence.

When he was sober, this was not to be borne. Hence his current custom, his defense, of drinking all evening against the time when there would be nowhere to go but home, no voice to hearken to but the voice of memory. Always the thought of the echoing emptiness that awaited him was a fearful one—until he ceased to think. It was when he had reached the state where nothing but finding his bed would matter that he took himself home, or suffered himself to be taken.

Sometimes, at home, in the morning, he could not remember how he had got there. Once he found himself lying on the studio divan, fully dressed, even to his heavy overcoat. Attached by a string to the buttonhole in the overcoat's lapel was a baggage tag upon which "TO" was printed and "Whom It May Concern,—East Ninth Street, City," was scrawled in an unknown hand. He had apparently been delivered like a bundle; by whom he never knew.

He was always making new acquaintances, who became old friends in the course of an hour, and once he learned in the morning that he had put two of these up for the night. Their names, they said when all three awoke, were Bill Pusey and Jerry Graham, and they were on from Detroit for some sort of convention. They were good fellows. Toby was relieved to note that even a very great deal of liquor did not impair his judgment of young men.

"But where'd you sleep?" he asked, among other questions.

It appeared that one had slept on the divan, and the other — Graham — on the studio window seat. "You wouldn't let me have that extra bed," Graham said cheerfully. "You were saving it or something. I started to get in it, but you raised such a row that finally I ran in here like a frightened rabbit—and hid on that ledge——"

Toby, eyes averted, said that he certainly must have been "tight as a tick."

"Whose bed is it—anybody's?" Graham inquired. "Or is it just there."

Toby said hurriedly, "Oh, it's just there." He said, by way of explanation, "Just some drunken idea of mine, I suppose. Must've been. I'm sorry."

But he was curiously glad.

Such excessive consumption of synthetic gin and cut whiskey as blurred his evenings could not, unfortunately, be confined to the evenings alone. In the mornings after the evenings there were drinks that he had to have. They were named. There was the drink called eye-opener, and the one, or more, called hair-of-the-dog. Quick shuddering drinks, for medicinal purposes only.

These, since he slept till noon or later, took him well into the afternoon. And the libations that were necessary to supplement them, to get him into his clothes and into a taxi and to the office, completed the circle. As he drove uptown (the noisome subway on such days was not to be thought of) he usually felt almost, though not quite, restored to vigor. Just one more shot would fix him, so he could do his work.

He would rap on the glass to the driver.

"Pull up just this side of the Star Building. See that

little black door, number three-twenty-seven? Right there——”

Often he never got to the office at all.

§

Puff had discovered Ann's absence. Intimation of this—a note addressed to Toby at the apartment—had come during the second week he was alone. He had known it was Puff's when he took the stiff square buff envelope out of the mailbox. The green ink was Puff's, and the green stamps to match, and the capital M's made of one long horizontal and three short vertical lines. He had snorted, looking at it, and his fingers ripping it open had not cared if they destroyed it beyond reading.

It had contained a torn piece of newspaper: Ann's story of the day before. With the green ink, Puff had drawn a circle around the words, “Hollywood, Cal.,” and from the circle a green line went to the margin, where was scribbled, “Is she *really*? For how long? And aren't you *lonesome*???”

He had ignored this communication. But he could not ignore the Christmas present that arrived a few days later. This was a very large and very handsome silver flask with an inner partition and two caps; it would hold a quart of each of two kinds of liquor. With it was Puff's card, the engraved name—Miss Pauline Randolph—inked out and a message covering both sides.

“I think,” Puff had written, “this is darn sweet of me—when you're so mean. Why haven't you called me up or anything? But never mind. You'll have to, now, to thank me. I insist on being thanked **PROMPTLY** and **IN PERSON.**”

Shorty Ross was at Toby's apartment when the flask

was delivered and opened. He pounced upon it, with cries. "Sa-ay! Why, say, it's *solid silver*! Judas, what a flask! Big as a chimney! *Look* at it, will you?"

Toby was looking.

"If it's monogrammed——" he began grimly. "Is it?"

"No," Shorty reported, investigating. "It doesn't seem to be. Yes it is, too! Right here, on the top of one cap. 'T. McL.' So," he said, "you can't bounce it back—if that's what you're figuring on doing."

"The hell I can't!"

"But——"

"They'll put a new cap on it," Toby said. "I'll see to that. Then back it goes, and she can return it or give it to somebody else—— Why, good Lord!" he exploded, red of face. "You don't think I'd *keep* the thing?"

His disgust was enormous. Shorty, watching and listening, looked entertained. "Merry Christmas," he observed softly. "It is more blessed to give than to receive'——"

He remarked that if Toby's proposed attempt to have the monogrammed cap replaced with a plain cap was unsuccessful, he, Shorty, would willingly change his name to something beginning with T. McL. "Theodore McLanohan," he suggested. "Or Thomas McLuke. Then you can tell Puff that although you are unable to accept her little offering, it has not been tendered in vain, for you have a friend—good old Thomas McLuke——"

But Toby was unresponsive. His mind linked Puff and his break with Ann too indissolubly together to permit of any levity in the present situation. Glowering, he fitted the flask back into its tan suede case and snapped the lock. "She's demented," he growled. "Sending me a—— Why, it's ridiculous! I never heard of such a thing!"

"Well," said Shorty philosophically, "that's life. Them as doesn't want, gets. Now if I——"

He stopped. "Sorry," he said, suddenly sober. "I didn't mean to kid about it. This Puff is an ouch to you, on account of what's happened—I understand that. Why," asked Shorty, "don't you tell her to go to hell?"

"Or I will," he added vigorously. "I could—and *like* it."

The flask was returned to its donor, unmonogrammed. The new cap had cost Toby eleven dollars. He enclosed a brief and conclusive note to Puff, explaining the substitution and the delay that it had caused. "I'm sorry," he said at the end, "if I seem ungrateful. It's a knockout flask. But why give it to *me*? I mean, after all—why go into the highways and byways?"

Shorty, who read this note, opined that it wasn't harsh enough. "You'll never get rid of her," he said, "if you're going to be polite."

"You call that polite?"

"Sort of."

"Read it again."

Shorty read it again. "We-ell," he said. "But I don't see any sense in saying the flask is knockout and you're sorry if you seem ungrateful, and all that. I mean, here's this female God-help-us who got you into all this trouble——"

"I got myself in."

Shorty grunted angrily. "Yeah! Her fine Italian hand wasn't discernible at all, I suppose! Oh, no! She didn't have a thing to do with it!"

"Well," Toby said, "I let her, didn't I?"

His moody eyes flicked Shorty's. "I can't hate her for that," he said. "I do, as it happens, but—I haven't any right to."

"I've worked up quite a lusty little hate there myself," Shorty declared balefully. "Right or no right."

The return of the flask elicited from Puff a second buff-colored note which Toby thrust into a pocket, unopened, and which Missouri presently sent to the cleaner's, where it spent days. In the meantime, there was a series of telephone calls, the first of which Toby in his apartment unwarily answered.

"Wrong number," he said immediately, recognising Puff's, "Hello—Toby?"

He hung up, and waited to see if the instrument would ring again. He thought perhaps it wouldn't; he had not troubled to disguise his voice. It did, however, within a minute. He let it ring.

For several days he continued to let it ring as it would, till it wearied. It might not be Puff; but he didn't particularly care to talk to anyone, anyway, these days—except Shorty; and Shorty was there with him most of the time. Other people said innocently, "What do you hear from Ann?" Or they pointedly refrained from mentioning Ann's name at all. Only Shorty was good to see, and comfortable to be with. And this best friend, understanding without being told how much he was needed, was sticking close.

The telephone bothered Shorty. He was calm at the first ring, nodding his head in agreement with and approval of Toby's familiar command to "Forget it." He remained fairly composed through the second and third rings, though his glance strayed toward the instrument and fixed with a dawning anxiety upon it. The fourth or fifth ring always demoralized him utterly. He would fidget, he would look pained, he would turn beseechingly to Toby.

"Don't you want me to see who it is?"

"It isn't anybody."

"It might be. It might be very important."

Shorty would suffer acutely until the eighth or ninth ring, when he would conclude that whoever it was, was gone now, anyway. This reflection relaxed him physically, and he would sit back in his chair; mentally he would become subject now to a sense of irreparable loss. Whoever it was, was gone. Whatever it was, they had missed it. Something had tried to get to them from the world outside. Excitement, perhaps. Romance. Opportunity. *Something*. And they had let it go.

"Maybe it was for me," Shorty would mutter at this point.

"Why? Does anyone know you're here?"

"They might try here. As a last resort."

In view of this inability of Shorty's to contain his curiosity and curb his flights of fancy when bells rang (he was the same about doorbells, Toby had found), it was not strange that in the absence of his host, with no one to forbid him, he leaped to answer any call that came. And thus it was that, on an afternoon just after New Year's, Shorty had a little chat with Puff. . . .

He was alone in the studio when she telephoned. Toby was sleeping in the bedroom beyond. It was five o'clock, or a little past. Shorty was waiting for five-thirty, at which time he would rouse Toby and see that he dressed and showed up at the office. While he waited, stretched on the divan, Shorty read magazines. Theatrical ones, sports ones, comic ones.

There had been three telephone calls in the past two hours. The first was Bill Hastings of Toby's paper. The second was, "Excuse it, please." And the third was a Miss Oliver, just arrived in town from Boston, and asking for Ann.

When Puff called, Shorty, although he had never met her nor heard her voice before, identified her instantly. It was an easy matter. She did not say, "Is Toby there?" or "Is this Toby?" but took it for granted; her opening remark was, "Well, at last! I've been trying and trying to get you—for absolute weeks! Where've you *been?*"

"He's been away," Shorty said helpfully.

There was a brief startled pause. The Puff's voice queried, "Who are you talking about? What number is this?"

Shorty told her. "I'm talking about Toby," he said. "Aren't you?"

"Yes, but—— Who is this?"

"This is Shorty Ross, a friend of his."

"Oh. I see," Puff said. "Well—is Toby there now?"

"No, he's still away. Or rather, he's away again. He's gone," said Shorty, inspired, "to California, to see his darling. He won't be back for some little time."

"He *has?*"

"He has, yes."

"When did he go?"

"Why, let me see," said Shorty. "Friday, I guess it was. Friday or Saturday. He must be almost out there now."

"Are you *sure?*" Puff protested incredulously. "I mean—well, he had a piece in this morning's paper about something that happened just yesterday, here in New York. I don't see how——"

Shorty was about to say hurriedly that the piece had been written for Toby (which was quite true) when Puff continued, "And I had a note from him, just the other day——"

Then Shorty had another idea altogether.

"Oh, you did!" he exclaimed. "Oh, then, that's different! You're someone he *likes*!"

"Why, of course," said Puff. "What—who did you think I was?"

Shorty favored the mouthpiece with a grin of unholy glee. "Well, you see," he said, "there's this silly little school-girl who's been chasing Toby bow-legged—and when you first called up I thought you were she!" Apologetic laughter was in Shorty's voice. "Awfully sorry!" he said. "The minute you said you'd had a note from him, I knew I must have got my signals mixed."

He laughed, and continued easily, "I can speak freely, then, can't I?"

"Why—yes. Of course."

"You're Miss ——?"

Puff hesitated.

"Oh, don't worry," Shorty said encouragingly. "As long as your name isn't Rand——" He stopped short. "I'd better shut up," he said. "You might know her. But what is your name, do you mind telling me? Before we go any further?"

"This is Miss Brown."

For the sake of the things he might wish to say later, Shorty decided upon recognition. "Oh, Miss *Brown*!" he exclaimed with warmth. "Of course! I've heard a lot about you!"

"Really?"

"You bet!"

"Well," said Puff, vaguely.

She dismissed amenities, feeling apparently that they were dangerous, and returned to the point. "What was it you were going to say?"

"Oh," said Shorty matter-of-factly, "Toby's here. That is, he's not in the apartment just now, but he'll

be here later. He's in town all right." He laughed again. "When I tell him I told *you* he'd gone to California," he observed, "he'll brain me! But as I say, I thought you were this little mosquito."

There was a pause.

"Did he——" Puff began uncertainly. "Did Toby tell you to—to tell her he'd gone to California?"

The question did not quite belong to the role of Miss Brown. But Puff seemed obliged to ask it anyway.

Shorty answered, "Well, no, not exactly. What he told me to do was to hang up on her."

"I don't believe you!"

"Oh, all right, Miss Brown," Shorty said quite pleasantly. "It's really nothing in our young lives anyway, is it?"

"No, but——"

"H'm?"

"'No,' I said."

There was another pause.

"It's amusing, though, of course," Shorty remarked then conversationally. "This terrific crush this poor kid's got on him. Hasn't he ever mentioned her to you?"

Puff's answer was slow in coming, and icy when it came. "No," she said. "I don't think Toby's the sort of person who—who goes around bragging about his affairs."

"Oh, this is nothing to brag about," Shorty assured her earnestly. "And it isn't an 'affair,' by any stretch of the imagination. It comes under the heading of a nuisance."

"Oh. Really?"

"Yeah. Terrible."

"How do *you* happen to know so much about it?" Puff asked acidly.

"Oh, I hear about it. I'm around the apartment here

a lot." Shorty meditated an instant, and said further, "Ann tells me about it. Or she did once or twice, back in the fall."

"What does she say about it?"

"Oh, she laughs. Of course," said Shorty, "in a nice way. You know Ann. She's really awfully sorry for the girl. Tries her best to get Toby to be nice to her, and all that. She's had a little luck," Shorty continued, "but not much. Toby has phoned this child a net of *once*, I think, in three months."

"I know why you're telling me all this!" Puff's choked voice cried. "I——"

"Do you?" Shorty said genially. "I'm sure I don't—except that you seemed interested. And you're a good friend of Toby's—why not?"

If Puff had meant to acknowledge her identity, she changed her mind. She demanded instead, "Is it your idea that all his good friends have got to know all about it?"

"Well," said Shorty, "most of them do already. It's a sort of a standing joke amongst us, if you see what I mean."

"Then he *talks* about it!" Puff raged. "Or how could everybody—— Oh, I think he's *low*! I mean, I don't care who the girl is, or whether he likes her or not—he has no business to be *telling*——"

"Wa-a-ait a minute!" Shorty interrupted. "*She's* the one who makes no secret of it. She phones his office so often that all the boys in the place know her voice—— They call her '*If-At*,'" said Shorty, extemporizing rapidly. "You know: '*If at* first you don't succeed, try, try again.' So they say to him, '*If-At* called at three o'clock, and again at——'"

Shorty broke off. "I beg your pardon?" he murmured.

There was no reply.

"Did I hear you hang up on me?" Shorty inquired.

Still no reply.

"Eureka! I did!" said Shorty, and hung up himself.

He went in and woke Toby.

"You see before you," he announced, beaming and bowing, "the Ross Exterminator Company——"

§

It was to Shorty that Toby owed his job, and he knew it. Shorty was getting him to the office daily now, seeing to it that he put in an appearance there, at least; piloting him past the little door, number three-twenty-seven. When it was possible, Shorty was writing his stories for him. When they had to be written in the Star office, Bill Hastings or Hank Lehmann or Tip Ferguson could be depended on. Shorty never worried about that. His concern was Toby's being there, at the right time, and in fair shape. The job was safe, comparatively, as long as the boss could see him.

Occasionally Toby was able to turn out a thousand words that Hastings or Lehmann, whom he humbly allowed to censor everything nowadays, deemed good enough. Oftener he could not work at all. Even to sit at his desk, pretending to work while someone worked for him, was torture. He would leave "for just a second," and go next door. . . .

He saw himself, sometimes. Sometimes he didn't care, it didn't matter. Sometimes he was frightened, thinking, "Like my dad." Thinking that this wretchedness was inescapable, was born in him. Staring with eyes that remembered, ahead at the years.

Sometimes he was ashamed.

There was the afternoon he found the scrapbook. A certain afternoon alone, at home. He had been searching for something else, and in the studio window-seat, which opened like a chest, he had come upon a large book with hard black covers, too wide to lie in the narrow space, and so standing upright on its edge. He had thought it must be a scrapbook of Ann's and, in a sense, it was. Ann had bought it, and pasted the newspaper clippings in, and annotated them. But the clippings were Toby's.

They were not many. Only the first three pages of the book were filled, covered over with stories that Ann had evidently considered his best. His story on the Yale-Harvard game, and the long feature story on Tex Rickard, and the one about Wee Willie Sherdel of St. Louis. . . . Some ten or twelve clippings, the earliest of which, and the first in the book, was his advance story on the Dempsey-Tunney fight, written twenty-four hours or more before he and Ann met. (How had she happened to get hold of that?) All the clippings were scissored and trim, and carefully dated in ink. "10-4-26." "11-15-26." . . .

The dates and the stories swam all at once before his eyes, so that he could not see them. His face worked. He could not have told exactly why he was so moved. Perhaps it was because he had not known of the scrapbook's existence: Ann, secretly saving and cutting and pasting. Perhaps it was the size of the book that so profoundly affected him. She had bought for his stories—for his *good* stories—such a big book, with so many, many pages.

He made a choked groaning sound, and put his head in his arms against the book that rested outspread on

the peak of his knees. "Oh, God——" he thought. "Ann. I will. I *will*."

He sat for a long time there on the floor, with his bent back to the window seat, and his head in his arms against the book. He looked utterly beaten. But in reality, after a while, he felt better, stronger, more nearly hopeful, than he had felt at any time in the month Ann had been away.

Most of the time he was sure that she would never come back to him. In hours of brooding upon himself and her and their life together, he had become convinced that this separation was permanent—even that it had been inevitable from the very first. "Why should she come back?" he asked himself often. Ann, who had everything. Ann, who was intelligent and sweet and beautiful. Ann, who could have any man she wanted—— Why should she come back to *him*?

He saw things clearly, or thought he did. Ann had not left him because he had broken a promise and told a lie. She had been driven by the whole sum of his delinquencies, of which the broken promise and the lie had been the last but by no means the least forgivable. This was what he had not bothered to explain to Shorty. This was why writing Ann the letter that Shorty advocated would be futile as whistling in the high hurricane. Not because of any little thing at all, but because of his immense unworthiness to have and hold her, she had left him. The best thing he could do for her was let her go.

So he reasoned, usually. He would not struggle. He would not seek to win Ann back by transient good behavior. In a little while, when this sharp agony subsided, as it must, into a bearable dull pain, he would stop drinking long enough to earn what he owed her in money.

Settle that account, and then—be on his way. No matter where, so long as it was out of Ann's way.

But there were moments when he remembered that Ann had loved him very greatly, and this was a thing not as heartening as it was strange, but heartening still. There was this scrapbook. Now was one such moment. He held under his hands a testimonial of fondness, of faith in him—even of pride. And the scrapbook wasn't so old. The last date wasn't so long ago. Perhaps even yet——

That day he drank nothing from two in the afternoon, until evening. He worked instead. Consuming cupful after cupful of hot black coffee—inefficacious substitute—he tried to write something. First he made an hour-long effort to start a short story. The beginning would not come. Expression was clumsy and ponderous and uninspired. Threadbare phrases. Clichés.

He changed his tactics, presently. Today he could not write, but he could put down the idea, the outline of the story, any which way. . . . His typewriter found its tongue, became voluble then. He covered eight pieces of paper almost without stopping.

He read them over.

"It's more than a short story," he said to himself. "It'll run longer."

Even to himself he did not dare to say that these eight pages were the bare synopsis of a novel. But they were. There was a full-length novel in this story of a great college halfback after college. His mind had realised that, when the idea first occurred to him. Or it might have been that his unacknowledged desire to write a novel had been parent to the plot.

If he had wished, he could have recalled the day and the very hour of the plot's conception. It had been two

or three weeks ago, around Christmas time. He had lain in bed all afternoon and evening, sipping whiskey and reading one of the two books that he had purchased the day before. The books were "Madder Music," by Dwight Knowles; and "We All Want Something," also by Dwight Knowles.

"Madder Music" was the one he had been reading that day. He had finished it before midnight, and for a while he had thought about it, lying back on his pillows, forgetting even his thirst. And he had thought, "This bird Knowles may be handsome as hell and all that—but if I couldn't write a better book than *this* thing——"

By and by he had found that he wasn't thinking of Knowles at all, nor of Knowles' book. He was thinking instead of Duke Van Dyne, who had been a magnificent athlete, an all-American football player, just after the War. When he graduated, Van Dyne had coached for a year in the Middle West; then he had dropped out of sight until last summer, when a friend of Toby's had recognised him, unofficially but beyond question, in the flabby giant with the prematurely gray hair who rubbed in a Turkish bath in San Francisco. . . .

What a story there! What a book could be written about that man! His splendour in the beginning, the sense of his own tremendous significance that it gave him; his total unfitness for life in any world beyond the world of sycophantic undergraduates and multi-colored, roaring stadium walls. (And who, after all, could write that part better than a sports writer? "Than I could?" Then the gradual stages of the fellow's physical and spiritual disintegration: the business failures, the various women, the drink——

"I could do all that," Toby thought, with creative detachment, gravely.

He had gone to sleep thinking about it. "*What a story!*" Then, as now, he had not been able to call it a potential novel in so many words, lest he be obliged to ridicule his own effrontery. But the last and lingering picture in his mind before he slept had been a picture of a book-sized page, with two small words, one above another

For
ANN

in the exact center. . . .

Now the nucleus of the story was here, in his hands, on these eight sheets of paper. He read through it a second time, slowly and absorbedly, jotting marginal notes. It was astonishing how the thing developed as he read, one detail or incident already noted suggesting another to note. His memory yielded up images of men he had known, and reminders of mannerisms and idiosyncrasies that had been theirs, and these together formed in his brain the composite man that was Van Dyne and yet was not Van Dyne nor any man living. He could almost see him. Jordan, his name was. Murray Jordan. The name came out of the void, belonging to him.

Then Toby decided that this eight-page synopsis, even with the penciled notes, was not nearly as full as he could make it—even today, with this ache in his temples and the sharp shooting pain in his eyeballs if he moved them too quickly. So he began again at the typewriter, and expanded the eight pages to eighteen and a half.

This took him two hours.

"There!" he said when it was done. "*Now!* Little drink on that, Toby, old horse—you've earned it——"

At eleven o'clock that night he was sitting in the sports department of the Star; simply sitting there, in his over-

coat, with his hat on. He had wandered in about half an hour before. He was not sober; yet he was not conspicuously affected by the various bracers and pick-me-ups he had had since twilight. The shrewd sharp eyes of kindly observers who would have hustled him out of sight if he had been, found no cause for such precaution. He lit cigarettes with hands that, though they shook a little, unerringly connected burning stub and fresh round tip. His glance, disinterested, perceived. He spoke when spoken to.

He sat at his own desk, with the back of the chair toward his typewriter, and seemed to be waiting. Actually, he expected no one. But it was as if he waited very patiently for a person or persons whom he had known all along would be late in coming. Who might not, indeed, appear at all. His was that anesthetised state that he drank to reach. Time was not. Obligation was not. Thought was not. He was just there.

At a neighboring desk, Tip Ferguson finished up a syndicate piece, corrected it, and prepared to take his leave.

"Going?" he said guilefully to Toby. "Come on."

Toby nodded. Without alacrity, he got to his feet. Whether he went or not was a matter of complete indifference to him. If Ferguson had said, "Going to stay there?" he would have nodded, and stayed there.

They left the big noisy city room, Ferguson in the lead, Toby with his hat-brim low over his eyes shambling docilely along behind him. In the corridor outside they halted, to wait for the elevator. Ferguson pressed the button. Toby, hands in his pockets, leaned his shoulders against the wall and crossed one foot over the other. The attitude suggested fatigue, nothing else. He seemed to need support because he was weary.

Ferguson said gently, "Tired, kid?"

"Yeah, I am."

"Why don't you go on home and go to bed?"

"I might do that," Toby agreed, after a moment. All his replies were slow, retarded, as if he answered the final echoes of things said.

The elevator man was an ageless tea-colored negro, named Jake. They spoke to him as they entered the car. Except for them, and a smeared youth from the composing room, the car was empty. They fell several floors, and Toby suddenly said, "How is he tonight, Jake? Any better?"

He listened attentively to a lugubrious report on the condition of an invalid whose identity and whose complaint were plainly well understood by him. "Temperature just the same?" was one of his questions. "Hundred and two and a half, eh? Up a little. Say, that's tough."

"Who's sick?" Ferguson asked curiously, when they had left the elevator and were moving toward the revolving doors to the street.

"One of his grandchildren."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Mastoid."

They went through the doors. On the sidewalk they stood a minute, tentatively, prepared to part. Ferguson, under the row of mimic moons that illuminate the front of the Star Building, regarded Toby, whose shadowed eyes reviewed the passing traffic. Ferguson was half smiling.

"You're the damndest," he mused aloud.

"Hmm?"

"I said, I didn't know Jake had any grandchildren."

Toby nodded. "He's got nine."

He shifted his feet, and looked hopefully at Ferguson. "Buy you a little drink?"

"No, I'm going along home." Ferguson began buttoning his overcoat, to prove it. "So are you, aren't you? And grab about ten good hours of shut-eye?"

"Come on," he added, "there's a taxi—no, it's a twenty-and-ten. But here's one coming——"

So Toby, submissive, apathetic, went along home.

He had left the lights burning in the apartment; in the studio, even in the kitchen. In the kitchen he poured himself the glass of whiskey called the night-cap, and drank it. He returned to the studio, extinguishing the kitchen lights as he passed through. His gait was aimless; he halted, and the swinging door rapped his heels and sent him on again. . . .

He stood presently beside the desk, looking down at the synopsis, the eighteen and a half pages that lay there in a neat-edged stack. He could see only the first page; the others were thickness. Standing still, with his fingers on the switch of the desk lamp, arrested, he looked at this first page, and through it; and his eyes and the shape of his mouth were not good to see.

He was thinking now. He was no longer vague.

"*That's* a laugh," he said to himself aloud.

His hand fell away from the lamp. It picked up a pencil, purposefully. Leaning over the desk, supported by the palm of his left hand, he printed across the top of the first page, this caption:

SYNOPSIS FOR

A BOOK THAT WILL NEVER BE WRITTEN

By

Toby McLean

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ANN did not come back in six weeks. When she had been away almost that long, Miss Lorna Hoffman left New York for Hollywood; and Ann, under orders from her office, tarried longer.

Miss Hoffman, it should be explained, was the cinema find of the Chronicle-Press. In October she had won a Metropolitan beauty contest which the paper (to boost circulation) had conducted, and by the same token, she had acquired a motion picture contract, which a producer (for the publicity) had offered. While Miss Hoffman as winner of the contest was adequate, being beautiful and living in the Bronx, it must be admitted that little or nothing of ultimate consequence had been expected of her, despite great ballyhoo to the contrary. Her contract was for a minor role in one production only. If the Chronicle-Press and the picture producer knew their beauty-contest winners—and they were afraid they did—Miss Hoffman would then be permitted to repair once again to obscurity and the department-store hosiery counter whence she had come.

Miss Hoffman, however, had had no such intention. From the moment she set foot inside the company's Eastern studios, it was plain that here—or there, i. e., the company's Western studios—she meant to remain. And to that end, she not only enacted her small role surprisingly well, but in addition so impressed a youngish assistant director named Burdick, an able and influential

man in the company, that his wife was said to be divorcing him.

By the time the picture was finished, Miss Hoffman had a long-term contract, and was acclaimed the greatest screen discovery since Clara Bow. The Chronicle-Press was authority for this prophetic statement, which it reiterated daily, and hysterically, patting itself on the back in columns and columns of photos and prose.

Miss Hoffman's face appeared large as life in the Sunday rotogravure, and twice as large on the trucks of the Chronicle-Press that passed in the streets. Sweetly she smiled at the city from billboards and placards, from subway news stands, from picture frames for sale in the store that had formerly employed her—even at last from a cigarette advertisement. Her intimate diary, the naive outpouring of a girlish heart, was evolved by two staff reporters in three profane afternoons apiece and published with success for thirty days. Her shopping expeditions became news, and her parties, headlines. She was made. Linotype-machine-made. Famous.

All this in New York. Now, at the end of January, Miss Hoffman was off to Hollywood, with her long-term contract, her seventeen trunks, her assistant director, her pet marmoset, her personal maid, her press agent, and her mother. And that the countless thousands of Manhattan's little shop-girls who had followed her meteoric rise from their ranks with bated breath, and with less of envy than of secret ecstasy, thinking, "*It can happen!*"—that these should not wish to go vicariously to the Coast with her was inconceivable. Wherefore the Chronicle-Press wired its movie columnist to stay out there, and to "give us Hoffman daily till further notice."

Toby had foreseen this. For weeks before he knew it definitely, he had inferred that Ann's return to New York

would be delayed by the Hoffman migration; that it might even be postponed until after he had gone to Florida. On a day in the last week in January, he telephoned the Chronicle-Press and asked if they could tell him when Miss Vaughn was coming back.

"Who is this, please?"

Toby said, "This is Metro-Goldwyn."

The girl in Ann's office with whom they had connected him replied that Miss Vaughn was not expected back "for two or three weeks."

"Evelyn Peyton speaking," she announced. "I'm handling Miss Vaughn's work." Her tone hinted that she was handling it very well indeed; better, in fact, by far, than it was ordinarily handled. "Is there anything I can do?" she inquired.

"No," said Toby coldly. (Confounded little upstart!)

He said to Shorty that evening, "I had it doped right. They're going to keep Ann on the Coast as long as the Hoffman story's hot. She probably won't be back here before March."

The Yankees would leave for St. Petersburg the third week in February.

"Oh, maybe she will," Shorty argued soothingly. "I'll bet she will. She'll be back before we blow, you wait and see."

But she was not.

Toby said to Shorty on the train going South that he supposed, anyway, it was just as well.

§

St. Petersburg was warm and bright, and it was nice to be there. "Restful," Shorty said mournfully. "Good for boys." It was not very gay. St. Petersburg was

never very gay to Shorty's way of thinking, being too full of the ailing, the elderly and the devout. But pleasant it was; a comfortable sunshiny city, with a laziness, with an indolence, with rows of painted benches on the sidewalks everywhere and a tropical striped-blue-and-lavender sea close by.

And it was a pleasant life the baseball writers led there. They had only an easy story a day to do. They must—or they should—watch the Yankees' daily workout at the ball park. The rest of their time was their own. There was swimming, of course. There was golf. In the evenings there were young ladies, for Shorty and other inveterate young-ladies' men. There were the movies. There were the dog races. There was always bridge, and always conversation. The ball club paid the expenses—room and board—of the correspondents. Salaries came as usual; and went farther.

"Training camp" suggests a rough and rustic life, rather lacking in the creature comforts. It suggests old clothes, bonfires, tents in a field. . . . Applied to the Southern quarters of a Big League baseball club, it is misleading, as everyone surely knows. The camp of the New York Yankees in St. Petersburg is a modern hotel, with automobiles parked outside it, potted shrubbery in the lobby, elevators, shower baths, sockets meant for curling irons, and rectangles of cloth depending from small loops of tape, which you will kindly use for drying your razor blades. In the lobby there are arm chairs among the shrubbery, and there are usually Yankees in white flannels in the arm chairs. When there are not, they are practising at the ball park some blocks off, in the shade of a thoroughly urban water tower.

Toby and Shorty, as in previous years, shared a hotel room. They were on the sixth floor, overlooking a green.

The room was a good deal too small for them, and it served too many purposes, being a sleeping room, a dressing room, a writing room, and a lounge. The confusion, as a result, was perpetual. Typewriters jostled trays containing utensils for serving refreshments. Pencils and corkscrews and shoe-horns dwelt side by side. They had more wearing apparel than the closet could accommodate, hence the three chairs acted as shelves, and the backs of the doors as auxiliary racks for shirts, sweaters, pajamas, bathing suits when dry, and plus fours. The beds were sometimes made, but they were almost never smooth; the pillows invariably bore the dent of a recent caller's head, and the spread, near the foot of it, the mark of his shoes.

It was a popular room. They were forever shouting, "Come in!" They were forever saying, "Oh, stick around." Casually they worked, shaved, took showers, arrayed themselves—went and came back again—while guests lay reading three-day-old home papers on the beds, or while interminable talk went on. Their stories were apt to be written to some such verbal accompaniment as, "Two spades" . . . "By" . . . "By me" . . . "Three diamonds" . . .

Occasionally one of the players would think to say, over a shoulder, "Ah there, Toby. How you making out?"

"Rotten."

"Want us to move? We can go in Vidmer's room——"

"No, stay where you are. It's not you."

There would be a little pause. Then someone might venture, "Need any help?"

Toby's dark head would signal a quick negative, visible to four pairs of lifted eyes. "No. Thanks."

He was writing his own stories, here in Florida. He was drinking still, but drinking less. Circumstances,

rather than conscious determination or effort of will on his part, had brought this about. There was less loneliness here. There was less brooding. There were no tangible reminders of Ann at all. He was better here. Already, after a fortnight, he was physically and mentally better. He drank only in the evenings. By day, for hours every day, he gave himself to the sun and the sea.

On the first day, he had been burned so badly that it had made him ill; he forgot every year how hot the Florida sun was. But now he could stand it. Now that first red burn where his bathing suit wasn't, was turning brown, and he could loll all day in the bright dry blaze. He was glad of his darkening skin. Somehow it always made him feel more muscular, more mighty, to be sunburned; though he knew how absurd that was.

He liked to lie prone in the sand with his face in his arms. He would turn over sometimes, in order that he might tan evenly. Sometimes he would swim. He was a superb swimmer, fast and strong and beautiful—buried except for his alternating elbows in the trough of the water. But most of the time he preferred to lie face downward in the sand. Resting. Absolutely motionless.

Then there was no world around him; nothing whatever existed, outside the cage he made for his head with his arms. He heard nothing. When he opened his eyes he saw only the close dim sand and his fingers in it. He felt drowsy. He watched his fingers moving; slow fingers, half asleep. Drowsily he thought of things that mattered not at all. Grains of sand. Hollows in the sand. A man he had known once who had eaten sand and seemed to like it. A childhood platitude about having to eat a peck of dirt in your life. Well, possibly. Depended on how long you lived.

He never thought of anything important in the least, lying in the sand. Things he ought to think of and knew he ought to think of were shadows hovering just outside his mind; and his mind was tired. He could not make it reach for and lay hold on these important things. They must wait. His mind was resting—mercifully. So he thought of sea-weed, and of shells, and of hour-glasses, and of what time it was, and of not caring anyway. . . .

Often he dozed, face downward in the sand.

Away from the beach, his mood was strange. He was unlike himself; and the stories he wired to the Star every day were unlike any training camp stories he had ever written. He did not realise this until it was called to his attention. He knew only that, nowadays, only personalities appealed to him. At the ball park of afternoons he scarcely watched the work-out. He was there to watch it, he would doubtless have said he was watching it; but his gaze would be intent upon an individual—a new recruit, or a failing old-timer, or the wife of the old-timer, biting her lips in the stands nearby.

He would be sharply aware of little individual dramas. He would notice slight significant things. He could *feel* for people; sense what they felt; think and understand what they were thinking. His stories ran accordingly. Whereas once he had contented himself with straight reporting, he leaned now to characterisation, incident, "color."

There was a day when the great George Herman Ruth, after fifty-four holes of golf in the morning, knocked five new baseballs into the distant creek beyond the outfield in the course of an hour. This would once have been Toby's whole story for the day. Now it was his lead; and the fans who gathered outside the players' house

after the practise to wait for the Babe—these were the story. The girl who requested an autograph in ink on the white silk collar of her dress. The small boy brought by his father to shake the hero's hand, who trembled so, and wept hysterically when it was over. The little old lady in the red-flowered shawl who wanted her snapshot taken with Mr. Ruth to send to her son in Colorado. "He's such an admirer of yours. He's never been anywhere where you play, but he reads all about you——"

"Sure, Mother!" the Babe had said. And he had surrounded the shoulders in the red-flowered shawl with an enormous flannel arm and posed for ten minutes. And then it had developed that the shawl was wrong side out and the flowers would not show up well in the pictures, so if Mr. Ruth didn't mind—just a minute more——

"Sur-r-re!"

They got the New York papers at the hotel (Sunday's on Wednesday) and read what they and their fellow correspondents had to say. It was Shorty who first remarked the difference in Toby's stories.

"Did the office tell you human-interest stuff?" he asked one day.

"No. Not specially."

"It's what you're sending, I suppose you know."

Toby on brief reflection discovered that this was true. "Well," he said, "if Mose doesn't like it, he'll say so quick enough."

"He ought to like it. It's damn good."

"I'm sick of the other stuff," Toby said. "The Yanks had a two-hour workout this afternoon and Cummings was in at short——' The hell with that, they get it from the A. P. anyway."

This was the only explanation he was able to make, even to himself, of the change. He did not know that he

was watching baseball with the eyes of Ann; seeing what she would appreciate; writing only what she might be interested to read. . . .

He did not know how much he hoped she read it.

She might. She was back in New York now. According to the Chronicle-Press, and his mental calculation, he had missed her by eight days exactly.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SHORTY went with him every day to the beach—but not to doze and dream. When Shorty reclined on the sand, he kept his head up; his elbows propped and his chin in the V of his hands. He lay facing the water and, when nothing of interest was passing between him and it, contemplating its color. Or, after a moment of such contemplation, looking down the beach for something of interest that might pass soon.

When something did, the Atlantic Ocean became to Shorty as a painted back-drop, and the silhouette moving against it was the thing. Shorty's glance moved also, slowly, with the silhouette. His head did not turn. Only the eyes swung in a leisurely arc from left to center to right, like a camera taking a panoramic picture. They were never impertinent eyes. At their boldest, they were merely humbly admiring. "Just let me look at you," they seemed to beg, "because you're so beautiful." . . .

In the phrase of his brethren, Shorty got away with murder that way.

He would disappear. Toby, rousing himself and lifting his head from his arms at last, would find his roommate gone from the sand beside him. Sometimes Shorty was to be seen in the water, teaching a squealing young lady to swim. Sometimes his back, in the blue bathing suit with the mothhole just over the fifth vertebra, would be visible down the beach a little way, in juxtaposition to an anonymous slim back in a bright red suit or a white or a green one.

When all else failed, he could be found at the platform of the beach guard, whose good friend (for politic reasons) he was. This was an especially blue-eyed, bronze-skinned, chesty beach guard; in the intervals of saving lives, he was consulted by an unbroken succession of loitering ladies on such subjects as sharks and sunburn. Shorty was the First Assistant Authority on both subjects. He had an airy reassuring flip of his hand about sharks. He was wonderfully sympathetic about sunburn.

It was Shorty who discovered, and forthwith met, the Sherman sisters. Toby never learned exactly how it came about; he slept through it, with a newspaper over his head. It did not seem to him when he woke that he had had more than forty winks. But whatever the interval, it had sufficed for Shorty.

"Look at that guy!" Toby grunted inwardly, when he saw him.

Shorty was the center of a close confidential trio, perched on the stone sea wall some yards away. His shoulders, rounded to hug his knees, looked smug. His beaming profile was impartial, appearing now at the right, now at the left. And indeed, there would have seemed little excuse for partiality; his companions viewed from the rear, were duplicates. They were one tanned blonde in a low-backed yellow bathing suit and another tanned blonde in a low-backed yellow bathing suit. The effect, Toby thought, was musical-comedy in the extreme. At any moment, additional blondes in yellow suits should join them, two by two, from right and left, until they were a chorus line; with Shorty, the smirking juvenile, in the center.

"Then," thought Toby, "they'll break into their dance." He did not molest them. He retreated down the beach

to what appeared to him a safe distance, and went in swimming.

When he emerged at the end of some fifteen chill and bracing minutes, Shorty spied him, and hailed him from afar. The trio still sat on the wall. Approaching along the hard stretch of sand beside the water, in obedience to a summons that he could not with manners ignore, Toby had time to observe that Shorty's ladies were vividly pretty. He would have sworn they were twins; and he knew that they were of the footlights. One such blonde would not necessarily, only probably, be a show girl. But two were inevitably a sister act.

He was right. These were the Sherman Sisters: Vivian and Vera. "The dancers," Shorty added matter-of-factly. And Toby murmured, "Oh, of course." (Later, in private, Shorty would say, "Ever hear of 'em? Neither did I.")

The Sherman Sisters had lemon-colored heads and hard little muscular dancers' legs. They had provocative profiles, with tilt noses. Their cheek-bones were rather high, their eyes oval; they had short blackened lashes, separate and stiff, like thorns. The eyes were blue,"—and *bad*," said Shorty later. By which he perhaps meant merely that there was nothing *ingenue*, there was no wondering, in the long blue stare of a Sherman Sister.

They were quite young. Vivian admitted to eighteen years; she was probably twenty. Vera was a year older. They were not as identical at close range as they had appeared from a little distance. Having features essentially the same, and the same expression, they had yet different faces. Vivian's was much the prettier.

They would, however, always dress alike; you knew that. Everything they wore—their street clothes, their dancing costumes—would be as alike as their yellow bath-

ing suits and their gaudy beach coats and the painted wooden clogs that clung to the soles of their small bare feet. They were from Broadway. And of it. Little hat shops and gown shops called Billie and Yvonne in Times Square and in the streets adjacent would display professional photographs of the dancing Sherman Sisters, autographed, as testimonials, on soiled chrome walls. "For Billie—who makes the cutest hats in New York—Best Wishes—Vera and Vivian Sherman."

Hats made by Billie would feature narrow thin veils across the eyes. Dancing frocks created by Yvonne (néé Mabel) of West Forty-eighth Street would be tight-bodied, full-skirted; trimmed with lazy ostriche, with glittering glass, with twitching fringe.

You knew.

The Sherman Sisters were cabaret entertainers. They not only danced, but sang. They had been in revues, they said hastily; and in vaudeville. But they were working in night clubs for the time being. Until they left N'Yawk three weeks ago, they had been at the Club Français. . . . Where was the Club Français? Why, on Fifty-third, between Seventh and Eighth. Toby and Shorty didn't mean to say they'd never *been* there? And they were *N'Yawkers*?

Said Vera, "Say, you two don't get around much, do you?"

"Hardly any," Shorty agreed sadly.

"Married?" hazarded Vera, after a moment's consideration.

Shorty shook his head.

"Broke," he said in a firm voice.

He always wanted that established early.

Toby said to Vivian, "But what are you doing down here? Just having a vacation?"

He was lingering. He had come up the beach to say hello and go along. But he wasn't going along. He had, in fact, added himself to the row on the wall. This was not—as it appeared—because Vivian was very pretty. It was not to look, it was to listen. After a three-minute sample of the Sherman sisters' conversation, he remained to share Shorty's veiled intellectual glee. . . .

He listened attentively while Vivian explained in her toneless voice, that was at once cabaret-high and cigarette-husky, why they were here. To begin with, they weren't here, they were in Tampa. Well, they weren't exactly in Tampa, they were at Davis Island in Tampa. Did Toby know where Davis Island—Islands, rather—were in Tampa? In the bay there.

"They made them," said Vivian of the islands. "What-do-you-called-them up, out of the bay."

"Dredged them up, you mean."

Vivian pondered. "That doesn't sound like it," she said surprisingly. "But anyway."

There was a club they called the Davis Islands Country Club that wasn't a country club really but a sort of road-house "like Ben Riley's;" and Vivian and Vera had been imported to sing and dance there. They had an engagement for the reason. Well, it wasn't really for the season. It was for six weeks. They were living in a furnished apartment they had taken on Davis Island and it was all right but they had to come to St. Petersburg to swim. It seemed that you could not swim in Tampa because of sharks and barracuda.

"Or garbage," Vivian amended doubtfully.

Anyway. There was supposed to be a pool somewhere around Tampa that you could swim in; but Vera didn't like pools and wouldn't swim in them. Toby wanted to know why this was, and Vivian said it was because once

when they were swimming in the Park Central pool in N'Yawk somebody dived right on Vera from a spring-board and sank her. "So we come over here to swim instead," concluded Vivian.

"I see it all now," said Toby gravely.

He was smiling within. This humorless girl with the colorless mind and the sing-song voice was funny. "So dumb she's marvelous," he told himself. Now while she rested from the labor of narration and drew on a cigarette, he surveyed her sideways, noticing several things he had heretofore missed. The ring she wore on the index finger of her hand; an oblong of onyx so large that it held the finger stiff, like a splint. She was evidently a chronic nail-biter. The little patches of raspberry-colored varnish on the ends of her fingers had no rims at all.

She sat with one shaved tan leg over the other knee, and swung the foot on its painted wooden sole. The toes appearing beyond the fabric strap that secured the clog had also little patches of raspberry varnish. Toby thought this interesting.

"Do you do barefoot dancing?" he asked.

"No. Why?"

"I just wondered."

"My Gawd no," said Vivian without emphasis.

Beyond her there was Shorty's freckled shoulder and his heedless ear; his face was averted, turned toward Vera. His voice drifted over: "*Will I?* Say! Invite me, that's all, just invite me!"

Vivian threw her cigarette away, and gripping the wall at her sides with her hands, leaned a trifle forward. Her yellow head moved, and she looked at Toby over her shoulder. It was almost the first time she had seemed to look directly at him. Now he perceived the shadowed wisdom

of her eyes, which was not intelligence, which had nothing whatever to do with the brain inside.

"Do you get over to Tampa much?" she asked.

"Not often."

"There're some baseball players over there," Vivian offered as inducement. "Washington, or something."

Toby evinced the startled gratification he felt was expected. "Is that so?" he exclaimed. "Well, well!"

"You're with the N'Yawk team, aren't you," Vivian observed. "You and he."

Toby nodded. "The Yankees." He divined that Shorty had not seen fit to explain their connection; they were probably two ball players, *pro tem*. Shorty was given to such untruths at times like this.

"What do you do," said Vivian now, "—pitch or something?"

"Pitch or catch. It's all one to me."

Vivian indicated Shorty. "And what does *he* do?"

"He's a bat boy."

"A what?"

"A bat boy. Runs out and picks up the bats and runs back in again—You know," Toby said. "You've seen ball games, haven't you?"

"You're kidding me," Vivian decided.

She appealed to Shorty, prodding his side to gain his attention. "Listen——"

"Yeah?"

"Are you a bat boy?"

"No, just playful," said Shorty. "Why?"

Vivian stared at him, blinking. Her expression suggested that she found him not quite bright.

"How do you mean?" she presently inquired.

"Let's all get drunk," Shorty suggested with great suddenness and seeming irrelevance.

"Let's," said Toby, traces of mirth in his voice.

The Sherman sisters agreed that this was a very good idea. They pointed out that today was Sunday. "We don't work tonight," added Vera, and Vivian said to Toby, "Do you work Sundays?"

"No. Not down here."

"Neither do we."

"We can make whoopee," droned Vera.

The funereal sound of this was too much for Toby. Abruptly he dropped off the wall to the sand below and started for the water. "Come on," he called back, "let's have a swim first."

"Wait for me-e-e," said Vivian plaintively.

He waited while she donned her bathing cap; a blue rubber bonnet with a chin strap, that made her seem an infant highly painted. Ends of yellow hair were coaxed from under the blue rubber and arranged in little puffballs on her cheekbones. As a final preparation for aquatics, unexpectedly she did a limbering exercise. This consisted in grasping her right ankle with her right hand and carrying the foot high high aloft, "—like Liberty's torch," thought Toby. With the foot she described a sort of arc in the air above her head and brought it down again. It was all very casual, even absentminded.

"Will the water be cold, do you think?" said Vivian.

The other two followed them in. Everybody stayed in for some time, although there was little actual swimming. The Sherman sisters' hair and complexions forced them to swim with their blue heads rearing, chins held high, uncomfortably. For the most part they preferred to stand up to their thin yellow waists in the water, patting the surface with their palms to make a very small, safe splash and looking dreamily off into the distance.

Shorty paddled in circles around them. Toby in the

beginning took a long swim, far out; but upon his return the Sherman sisters' profuse shrill praises of his prowess made him feel an exhibitionist and a fool. He confined himself to floating and a modest side-stroke, after that.

The afternoon was waning when they left the water. Shorty asked the time of a clothed passerby with a probable watch, and learned that it was after half past five. They would dress and ride to the hotel, Shorty said, and do some drinking. "Then we'll have dinner somewhere—and then we'll get hold of a car, maybe, and drive you back to Tampa——"

In the gentlemens' lockers at the bathhouse, while they dressed, there was argument.

"Look here," said Toby, starting it, "fun is fun. But when it comes to spending the whole evening with these two, count me out."

"Why?"

"Why, because I won't, that's all. Reason totters," Toby added, "as it is."

"Oh, now," protested Shorty, "don't be like that! Stay with me." Over the wooden partition between their lockers his voice demanded, "What are you going to do all evening, then?"

"Nothing."

"Well, don't you like this pair? I mean, if they're not a *riot*——! Come on," Shorty urged. "Grab yourself an evening of laughs. You need it."

Toby said drily that he had laughed enough. "Give somebody else a chance," he said.

To this end, when they reached the hotel, he sent Shorty and the Shermans up to the room ahead of him, while he went recruiting comrades to join the party. In the lobby he found Chris Hanley, a willing victim. Three bridge players in a sports writer's room on the fifth floor were

tired of playing three-handed anyway. Charlie Sully, roused from a nap, would be up when he put on a collar and tie. Harry Griffin with brightening eye said, "Wimmen?"

Out of this number, Toby felt certain, one or more gentlemen would be glad enough to substitute for him this evening. He repaired to the sixth floor, accompanied by Harry and Chris. The door of the room was open, and Shorty's voice ordering quantities of White Rock and ice by telephone could be heard the length of the hall. "And listen, Room Service," he said in conclusion, "—if I may call you that when we've never met—Send it *now*, understand? None of this thinking it over."

From the threshold, the room seemed full of Sherman sisters, in scant white flannel sport suits, jade-green short-vamp shoes, no stockings. They wore sixty-inch strings of large pearl beads, wrapped twice around their throats and dangling in parabolas. They had removed, and placed on Toby's dresser, their white berets.

They were gazing around. "What do ball players do with typewriters?" Vivian was inquiring of Shorty.

"Oh, we write our autobiographies for the papers."

Harry and Chris were introduced, as Mr. Gehrig and Mr. Lazzeri. The Sherman sisters looked blank, and Toby murmured, "I guess I should have brought Babe Ruth."

"Oh, is he here?" Vera cried excitedly. "Babe Ruth?"

It was plain that if he was here he would have to be produced at once. "As a matter of fact," said Shorty, "he's not. He was traded to Minneapolis last Tuesday."

Vivian was telling Chris, who had seated himself beside her, that she had heard that "famous athletes and people" who wrote things for the newspapers didn't really write them themselves at all. . . .

"Listen, men!" Chris cried indignantly. "Listen to this!"

He repeated the rumor.

"It's a *lie*!" they bawled in chorus.

"That's the way it is," added Harry Griffin dourly. "Work your fingers to the bone, and some louse of a newspaperman gets the credit."

Charlie Sully arrived, and became Grover Cleveland Alexander. The glasses and ice arrived, and the drinking began. The three erstwhile bridge players arrived en masse, bringing the fourth they had been looking for all afternoon—just in from the golf links. In a quarter of an hour or so, the Sherman sisters were playing to an immensely appreciative stag audience of nine. They were having a very good time indeed. So, too, after its fashion, was the audience.

They packed the room. There were young men seated on the window sills, on the desk, on the beds, on the floor. Each had a thickish hotel tumbler in his hand, which he brandished while he talked, fortifying himself by gulps between times. Everybody smoked, and the little room was densely foggy. Everybody shouted to be heard. The telephone rang twice in the course of the first half hour of the party; but no one answered it. It would be the management, about the noise.

Said Shorty oratorically, "To add to the gaiety of nations——" He glanced at the Sherman sisters "—including the Scandanavian—we shall have with us presently, the house dick: a splendid fellow——"

"Save him a drink."

"I am," said Shorty, pouring.

"I don't like house dicks," Vera remarked suddenly, nervously.

"Why not?"

"Yes, why not?"

"Tell us all about it."

"Fresh!" said Vera to the roomfull, and Shorty nodded approvingly at her, observing over his shoulder, "I guess that'll hold you guys a while."

He put a tumbler half full of whiskey behind Ann's picture on Toby's dresser, for safe-keeping.

They ran out of ice, and drank their highballs warm. Amazingly soon, considering that they had had two full quarts to start with, they ran out of liquor. Hanley was assigned to search the nearby rooms of friends. "*Absent* friends," Shorty stipulated sternly. The telephone jangled again. Vera said she was sure she smelled something burning, and inside a bureau drawer open a crack a smouldering cigarette was found in the folds of a sweater of Toby's. Chris returned, triumphant, with miscellaneous supplies, and with one Ben Walkley of the New York Call.

"I thought he was absent," Chris explained apologetically, "but he was just hiding."

Toby took over the mixing of drinks at the desk, relieving Shorty, who was busy beseeching the Sherman sisters to dance. The Sherman sisters said there wasn't room and besides they had to have music, and seven men at once asked Toby where his banjo was.

"Home," Toby said. "I didn't bring it."

He had not thought of bringing it, this year."

"I wish I had," he said regretfully.

"Listen to that damn phone," somebody grumbled.

"It won't be long now!" predicted Shorty.

The Sherman sisters were persuaded to sing, since they wouldn't dance. The bureau was cleared, and they hoisted themselves backwards onto its plate-glass top. Sitting

there, side by side, rocking right and left in unison, they sang a Baby song in their little husky night club voices. Their elbows were lifted and bent, their hands below their ears, palms outward. Vivian carried the air, and Vera warbled the *vo-deo-dos*. They were rather good. They were not musical at all, but their rhythm was perfect, it was contagious; and they had the gestures. It was quite the sort of thing one paid five-dollar *couverts* to see.

The audience was delighted. Encores were cried for, and the Sherman sisters obliged, again and again. Their songs were all of a kind: the cabaret kind, called hot, called blue. They sang about sin, in baby-talk. They sang about love and loneliness. They sang about infidelity; gross cruelty; and desertion. They sang:

*"If I should die
Before I wake
What do I care? . . ."*

And the audience, a little drunk, brayed happily:

What do I care? . . ."

Toby among them. Waving his glass, he brayed as happily as anyone else. He had had more to drink than the rest—during the whole first hour of the party he had sat drinking conscientiously, saying nothing—and it had made him almost as merry as they. His was a transient exuberance he had known in the past, that had been eluding him lately. He felt fine. This was a good boomer. These were great girls. "When they're singing," he added mentally. "Another case of 'For God's sake, sing!' was all."

*"Nights are long,
Life is short,
What do I care?
What do I care? . . ."*

Somebody played accompaniment on a comb. Feet beat the time. Shorty, with a toothbrush for a baton, led the chorus. The Sherman sisters had been thirsty between songs; now they were flushed and doubly shrill. The smoke in the room was reddening the rims of everyone's eyes a little. Chris tried to open the transom. It wouldn't open. Ben Walkley offered to bet five dollars that he could open it. He couldn't, and finally he crashed the glass with a brassie, showering the hall outside.

*"Oh, I can't float
Ain't got no boat. . . ."*

Somebody had on one of the Sherman sisters' white berets, and one of the Shermans had on a cap of Shorty's, the visor behind. The heels of their little green shoes had scarred the middle drawer of the bureau. Vivian's string of pearls had snapped, and you stepped on pearls on the floor. A chair had collapsed, the bowl of melted ice with the cigarettes floating in it had been overturned, and an attempt to pry loose a bottle cap on the edge of the telephone's mouthpiece had bitten out a jagged triangle. The attempt had been made by Toby, and he had been amused when the instrument, as if in pain and protest, instantly began jangling again.

"There, there," he said to it soothingly. But it continued to ring, and finally he set the receiver down, off the hook.

"Musn't cry any more," he remarked into the mouthpiece.

That had been some moments ago. Now, the "What do I care?" song having been brought to a howling finale, the vocalists, Toby included, were rendering with twice the verve and volume of their previous performance, the more familiar

*" . . . Drunk last night,
I was drunk the night before. . . ."*

"Somebody knocking," said somebody near the door.

He was not heard, and presently he got up languidly—he was Walkley, and he had been sitting against the head-board of Shorty's bed—and went to the door. He opened it, and put his head out, remaining thus for an interval.

He was not noticed.

*"For I am a member of
The souse fam-i-lee. . . ."*

Walkley drew his head in, and turned. "McLean!" he bellowed.

*"So it's
Glo-o-or-i-ous. . . ."*

Walkley closed the door and made his way to Toby's side. "Listen," he said, with voice and elbow.

Toby reluctantly subsided, and inclined his head to Walkley's.

"You better get on the phone," said Walkley. "New York's trying to get you. Been trying for the la——"

"Who is?"

"NEW YORK! Are you deaf?"

"How do you know?"

"Operator downstairs just sent up a bell-hop. Said you

answered a minute ago and then left the——There it goes again.”

Someone had replaced the receiver, and the telephone was again jangling. Toby handed his drink to Walkley. “Here.” He started for the instrument. It occurred to him that everybody would have to quiet down, if he was to hear anything. It did not occur to him to take the call in some other room.

He was a little more than a little drunk, just now.

“Everybody shut up!” he directed at the top of his voice. “Hey!” He climbed on the bed and stood there, the telephone from the bedside table held in both hands. “Pipe down, will you? Please? The office wants to tell me I’m fired or something——”

He was most jovial. He stepped down from the bed, and with a flourish unhooked the receiver, sweeping it widely up to his ear. He sat back on the little table, ankles crossed, head against the wall. “Hullo,” he said. “Yeah. Well, I didn’t feel like talking just then. You know how it is. . . . Oh, positively loquacious, at the moment! . . . All right, put ’em on. . . .”

The room was reasonably quiet. Everyone was prepared to be entertained. Only Shorty looked thoughtful. He looked worried. Rising suddenly from an armchair, spilling a Sherman sister off his lap, he hurried down the little lane between the beds. “See here,” he said in an undertone to Toby. There was still enough commotion so that he was not generally heard. “Don’t be an ass, now,” he said. “You talk drunk and you *will* get fired!”

“That’s a song!” exclaimed Toby, pleased. “Listen——” To a nursery tune he had not heard nor thought of for twenty years, he chanted: “‘*You-u-u* get drunk and you *wi-i-ill* get fired, you *wi-i-ill* get fired, you *wi*——”

"Hullo?" he checked himself to say again to the telephone.

Then Shorty in desperation put his lips to Toby's free ear. "Maybe it's *Ann*!" he whispered warningly.

So that Toby, though he did not for a moment believe that it would be Ann, was all at once quite unsmiling, saying to New York, "Yes. This is he." . . .

Shorty stayed beside him. In effect he mounted guard over the room, keeping it in order. When anyone spoke he glowered and flapped his hand. One Sherman sister, into whose ear Chris Hanley had been murmuring, giggled outright; then put her palm over her mouth, having caught Shorty's eye.

"Who? *Eunice*?" Toby was saying in a puzzled voice. "Why—hullo. How are you?"

His eyebrows drew together, stayed that way.

"Who's *Eunice*?" Vivian wanted to know, *sotto voce*. She nudged Chris. "Who's *Eunice*? His girl?"

"Sh-h!" said Shorty sharply.

"Yes, I can hear you," Toby was saying. Quick clipped words, impatient, urging her to get on. "What is it?" he said. "Is—have you seen Ann?"

He listened hard. His eyes met Shorty's eyes and concentrated, though he seemed not to perceive him. In the lull of his listening somebody struck a match on a match-box, and Shorty wheeled furiously. "*Can't* you keep still?" his wordless gesture demanded.

"Excuse me," the offender muttered, "for living."

"She *what*?" cried Toby, leaning slightly forward. "I didn't get that——"

Watching him, it was impossible that he had been uproarious, inane, a moment ago. His insobriety was gone, with gaiety, completely from him.

"But what's the *matter*?" he shot out.

Now all at once the room was still, perfectly still. Something was happening. Something was horrifying Toby's eyes, suddenly making his big hands holding the telephone shake like leaves. Now he wheeled, turning his back on the room; crouched over the telephone, bent as a man bent with mortal physical pain. "How?" his hoarse frantic voice tore the silence. "Poisoned *how?* What _____"

There was a little almost inaudible stir all over the room, the hint of a straining forward that was controlled. Nobody really moved. They waited. Sober. Figures of stone, with live cigarettes dying slowly in their fingers. Only the lips of one or two of them moved, repeating the word they had heard, unaware that they did so.

Toby's voice again: "*What?* I can't——"

Another instant's hush. Then there was a sound from him, something like a sob, something like an oath, choked down, and terrible to hear. He tried to speak, and could not; wrenched himself away from Shorty, who would have spoken for him; tried again. "*How—bad is it?—*"

Shorty turned upon the room again, and everyone looked at him. He was closer to Toby, closer to this catastrophe, than they. He was even suffering. Sweat stood on his forehead. He motioned with his head for them to go, to leave the room; with his eyes he begged for Toby this small kindness.

"We better clear out," Chris Hanley said, low, to the rest. Unnecessarily. They realised, for themselves; and they went. Someone near the door went first, and they followed, flocking silently, trying to tiptoe, trying not to tread on the crunching glass in the hall outside. . . .

Only Shorty remained.

They shut the door softly. Beyond it they gathered in an agitated group and someone—one of the Sherman sis-

ters—whispered, “Who is it? Who’s it *about*?” and someone answered, “His wife,” and someone else said, “Don’t talk here.” Still they lingered. Nobody seemed able to decide what they ought to do now, exactly. Curiosity and genuine anxiety held them, though they felt a little guilty, a little ghoulish, hovering here. Through the open transom Toby’s voice was as audible as it had been in the room. He was choking, “Oh, Christ—don’t *lie* to me, Eunice! I’ve got to *know*——”

Vivian Sherman plucked somebody’s sleeve. “Do you s’pose she’s de——”

“Keep still! For God’s sake!”

“Come one,” Harry Griffin said abruptly, imperatively, under his breath. “Let’s get away from the door, at least.”

The open door of Walkley’s room was a few yards down the hall. They repaired there, and went inside. They waited. Walkley’s roommate was there, and everybody told him about it. People sat down as if they might at any instant jump up again. Harry Griffin stayed near the door and every now and then went to the threshold and looked up the hall toward Toby’s room.

“Still talking,” he reported. “I can hear him.”

Presently he said that he thought they had rung off; he couldn’t hear Toby any longer.

“Somebody go and find out what it’s all about,” he said.

“Why not you?”

“Better wait a while.”

“Yes,” said a Sherman sister. “Because maybe he feels bad.”

There had already been a subdued discussion of such meagre facts as they had. “Poison *liquor*?” someone had suggested, and Chris Hanley had said at once, “No, it

can't be that. Ann doesn't drink—well, that is, she only drinks a little——”

“It only takes a little,” Walkley had put in.

“About a thimblefull,” somebody else said.

“Yeah, I know. But it can't be that,” Chris still maintained.

It was, however.

After quite a while, Shorty came and told them.

He came primarily to borrow money for Toby's passage to New York. “As much as you've all got,” he said. “He and I only have nine dollars between us.”

They turned their pockets inside out. Shorty, collecting, explained what had happened. “It's God-awful,” he said tersely. “I never heard anything worse. She had a cold, do you see, and she took a little whiskey, hot—— There was a bottle Toby bought the night before we started down here, and then forgot to pack at the last minute. I remember he was beefing about it on the train, all the way to Washington—about this whole new quart he'd left behind. He can't remember now where he bought it—he was cock-eyed that night, cruising all over town——”

“Yeah, with me,” murmured Harry Griffin.. He shook his head. “I can't remember either.”

“Anyway, it was out of that bottle. They think it's methyl alcohol, but they're not sure yet. This was last night when she went to bed she drank the stuff, and this morning she woke up feeling dizzy and sick—thought it was grippe at first. But it got worse in no time, and she called up Eunice Hay who lives near there and asked her to come over, and Eunice as soon as she got there called a doctor. By the time the doctor showed up, Ann was delirious, and she was unconscious when they took her to

the hospital. They've been trying to telephone Toby ever since. All afternoon."

Shorty came to a full stop. "She's—she can't——"
He stopped again. "Her eyesight's affected," he said then, difficulty, as if he could not bear to hear himself.

There was a gasp.

"Not *permanently*?"

"They don't know."

"You mean she's *blind*?"

Shorty fumbled the money in his hands. He kept his eyelids lowered. "She can tell light from dark——"

His voice trailed off.

It seemed a long time after that before anyone spoke or made a sound.

"Isn't she going to get well?" This was Chris, finally.

"They think she'll get well," said Shorty. "They told Toby so, anyway."

Toby. . . .

"How is he?" someone asked.

Shorty raised his eyes then. They were level, and eloquent.

"How would he be?" he answered simply.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

EUNICE met the train on Tuesday morning. At the top of the steep staircase that was the ultimate link of a long chain, the hook attaching the ribbons of steel from Florida onto Manhattan, she was waiting. She stood close to the gate, in an orange hat and a leopard-skin coat; still Toby did not see her at first. He had not expected her, nor anyone, to meet him.

Almost as soon as the train stopped he was out of it, carrying his own bag, hurdling the only half-demolished mountain of other baggage that blocked the door. His car lay near the stairs. He mounted rapidly, two steps at a stride, ahead of the crowd, his free hand on the railing giving him leverage. He did not lift his head. It was by his size that he was unmistakable from above, and by the way he moved: a man released, who now at last could make his own time.

Eunice caught him at the top. "Toby—wait——

"Oh, it's all *right*!" she cried out the next instant. "She's better! I just thought I'd come down and meet you, that's all. Bill Hastings and I. Bi——"

"She's better?" Toby repeated.

He set down his bag and removed his hat mechanically. His eyes that had stared through two nights at the near dim lid of a lower berth were exploring Eunice's eyes, straining to read them. He looked gaunt. His face was thin, the sun-dyed skin seeming stretched too tight over the cheekbones. For a moment Eunice's gaze betrayed only shock at his appearance.

Then she bethought herself, and nodded vigorously. "Much better. The doctor says entirely out of danger. I wired you that last evening—didn't you get it?"

"I got it, but——"

"The sickness doesn't last long, you know," Eunice said. "It's something like a severe attack of ptomaine. She was a whole lot better yesterday, and she had a good night last night. I called up to ask, just before I came down here. She feels fine this morning. Almost well."

Eunice's clear quick definite voice was easier by far to believe than all her paper telegrams to the train. The tension like a sustained electrical charge in Toby's nerves gave a little. Just a little.

He said, "But she's still——She can't see any better?"

"Oh, she couldn't *yet*," Eunice answered smoothly. Too smoothly. "That takes time.

"Look," she added at once, laying four fingertips on Toby's sleeve, "let's get Bill and get out of this mob-scene. He's over there. We didn't know which stairway you'd come up.

"We can talk in the taxi," she concluded, over her shoulder.

They joined Hastings. There was the same expression in Hastings' eyes when he saw Toby that there had been in Eunice's, but he only said rather gruffly, "How are you, old man," and tried to take the bag Toby was lugging.

"I've got it," Toby muttered, "thanks." He gripped the handle harder. A violent trembling was inside him now, a sudden weakness. Reaction. The heavy bag was something to hang onto, till it passed.

They did not talk a great deal in the taxi. Anything anyone said that was not about Ann sounded far-fetched and forced; and of Ann there was, there could be, no conversation, save the simplest questions and the simplest

answers. Toby asked what her temperature was, whether the room she had was a good one—whether or not she knew he was coming this morning. Eunice, in replying that Ann did know, unthinkingly said, “She’ll be so glad to see you.” After which no one for a moment found anything to say at all.

“How was St. Pete?” Hastings finally abruptly demanded.

“Same as ever.”

“Play any golf?”

“Yeah, a little.”

“You’re brown,” Eunice said.

Another silence fell, during which Toby stared through the frosted window and Eunice from the side and Hastings from opposite covertly eyed him. They were headed for the hospital, across town and down. “You want to go straight there, don’t you?” Eunice had observed before they started. She would drop him there. She had, she said, an assignment in the neighborhood. Hastings was to ride as far as their turn off Fifth Avenue, where he would change cabs and deliver Toby’s bag at the apartment.

The going was difficult. New York had had a snow-storm yesterday, and the streets were narrowed by banks of snow between which cars and trucks crawled single file. It was very cold. On the taxi’s window there was a sticker saying HEATED to the shivering world; but it lied. Their breaths were quick slight vanishing plumes in the air within.

“Cold as hell,” said Hastings, “isn’t it.”

“Isn’t it!” Eunice echoed.

“Cold, Toby? I should think you would be,” Hastings argued, as Toby shook his head. “Out of the frying-pan into the icebox—You want to watch out you don’t catch

your never-get-overs." He paused, and added, "Listen, how about a little shot to warm you up? I brought some along——"

He was pulling a flask from a hip pocket. It was manifest to Toby that Bill had been wanting to give him a drink, on some pretext or other, ever since they started. "I guess I look like the wrath of God," he thought disinterestedly. Despite their eyes, he had not thought of it before.

He refused the drink. "I'm warm enough," he said. "Thanks."

"Just a swallow? Do you good, no fooling."

"Not right now. Thanks just the same."

He did not say that he had whiskey in his suitcase, packed by Shorty, which all the endless way from Florida he had not touched. He turned back to the window, trying to look as if he did not know that Bill was looking at him, and that Eunice was looking meaningly and fixedly at Bill—nudging his shoe with hers.

"Check," Bill murmured.

He put the flask away.

"When was the snowstorm—yesterday?" Toby queried, eyes still on the window.

They replied in detail for some minutes. They did not expect him to listen, and he didn't listen. When another lull came, he spoke again of Ann, asking who this Doctor Beauvais was. He listened then, while Eunice explained that he was the celebrated eye specialist whom the other doctor had called in. Hastings contributed the fact that Beauvais was one of the best in the country. Toby said, "What does he think?" and Eunice said, "He's very hopeful." Which, Toby knew, was what she would say.

He said, "Will he be at the hospital?"

"Oh, surely. Some time this morning, if he isn't now."

"You see," said Hastings, "the thing is, that it was methyl alcohol. Now if it had been *wood* alcohol——" He shook his head.

"They analyzed it," Toby said, "of course."

"Yes."

"Sunday," Eunice supplemented.

Toby looked at the taxi-driver's picture; but his eyes appeared to be looking miles away.

"I bought that stuff, you know," he said. It had shrieked in his mind for two nights and a day, but he said it quietly. "I meant to drink it on the train going down."

"You were lucky," Hastings nodded, before he thought.

For an instant they had reason to hope that Toby had not heard. Then they felt him stiffen. They saw his eyes return, become present. Incredulous eyes, and fiercely blue. "'*Lucky?*'" he queried, as if he couldn't have understood.

He stopped. When he spoke again his voice was slower, and less harsh. "You mean I might've—gone blind," he said. "And I didn't. Ann did—instead of me."

He looked at Hastings. "If you call that '*lucky.*'"

§

He had been in the room for half an hour before he really saw it. He knew only that it was the usual hospital room, with the high bed, the iron stand painted white beside the bed, the one wide window. Now the nurse had brought some milk that Ann must drink, and while she drank it Toby, for the first time since he entered, let his gaze stray.

He sat back in the rocking chair and looked about him. Green walls. Fresh white net curtains at the window. Walnut bureau. The partly open door of Ann's private

bath. Really not a bad hospital room. It seemed a little larger than most; and less severe. The flowers did that.

Surely there were never so many such gorgeous flowers. Everybody loved Ann so.

His eyes returned to her. The head of the high white bed was raised, to make a sort of long chair of it, and Ann was propped against two firm white pillows. Thus she had been when he saw her first: sitting up, looking pretty, looking usual, and *well*. Her hair smooth, her head dark and small against the pillows. Her mouth reddened with a little lipstick, her cheeks colored with a little rouge.

She had been awaiting him, and ready a long time. Her nurse, who had come downstairs to conduct him up, had told him that indirectly. "She's wonderful, really," the nurse had said. "Bravest little thing! The only time she's cried at all was here awhile ago, when Miss Hay phoned to say that your train would be twenty minutes late." . . .

He had reminded himself of that repeatedly in the past half hour. Ann had cried when his train was late. Ann—who seemed so indifferent, now he was here.

Ann had cried. Yet when the nurse carolled from the threshold, "Here he is, Mrs. McLean!" and he managed his prepared, easy greeting: "Hullo, darling,"—the lighting-up of her face was so swift a thing and so swiftly over that he could not be sure he had seen it at all.

"Hello, Toby," she said simply. Neither happily nor unhappily. She did not smile. She did not reach out her hands toward him. She who had wept for impatience because he would be delayed a little, held herself rigid, tense, in his arms when he closed them around her. And he fancied she looked relieved when he let her go.

Almost the first thing she said to him was a curious formal thing: "You were awfully sweet to come all the way up here." . . .

She didn't care any more. Gradually to the turmoil of his emotions was added this new, and yet not unforeseen, heartsickness. Ann was not his any more. This constraint of hers, this—this *politeness*—was her way of telling him that she was changed, that he had lost her.

No other explanation that his mind could find held good while they talked. Ann was not angry still. Their long separation, their quarrel, Puff Randolph—these things had faded into insignificance, these recent days. He had a feeling when he mentioned them that even mentioning them was needless. When, briefly and haltingly, he spoke of Puff, explaining to Ann at last what he had not explained, he felt that she believed him, but with as little interest as though he said, "The day is fine."

She made one comment, smiling very slightly. "Doesn't all that seem far away and long ago? It does to me."

She made one apology. "I've been so ashamed of myself for saying what I said about—'my' apartment. That was inexcusable. I'm sorry, Toby."

So it wasn't anger. It wasn't bitterness, born of the fact that he was in a measure responsible for her affliction. She knew no such bitterness, had evidently had no such thought.

It was none of those transient, reparable things.

He decided now, watching her sitting there—slowly and rather wryly drawing the milk through the little glass tube—that her fit of weeping before he arrived had meant nothing whatever. He had been clutching at straws, to take comfort of it. An invalid's overwrought weeping. . . . He might as well face this. It wasn't as if he had not been telling himself for almost three months now, that it would be so.

His gaze brooded on her. He thought, "I can still love her. She can't stop that." And he could be with her, he

could take care of her—till she was better. After all, her getting better mattered most. He didn't matter.

He thought how lovely she was; thought he had not remembered quite how lovely. Her eyes were beautiful. He had been haunted by a vague, unthinkable apprehension—— But her eyes were clear and bright and beautiful as they were always. The pupils were dilated. That was all.

Now her lashes were downcast, deepening the faint shadows underneath. She sat forward, an elbow thrust back against the pillows. She wore a hospital gown with high tight collar, and long sleeves reefed short, folded neatly into big cuffs near the shoulders. Ann would do that. Shapeless sleeves like those. She looked very young, a grave and patient lovely child, drinking milk while the starched white nurse stood over her. Absently Toby watched the dimple in her left cheek appear and disappear again with her suction on the tube. He watched her lashes lift——

He shouldn't be looking at her this way, he thought; and he glanced down. He had not forgotten how, when he first sat here beside her, she had begged him—suddenly, miserably—not to look at her. "Please don't." She had averted her face. "I don't want—anybody to look at me."

He had not forgotten. Recollecting now, his eyes filled up again, as they had then. And as they had since. Tears were very near the surface, in this hour. Again he reached for the bulge in his breast pocket that was a handkerchief, and angrily blew his nose. This must stop. He must stop it.

He got up, leaving the rocking chair rocking; hearing simultaneously the click of the tube against the side of Ann's glass.

"Toby?" she cried out.

"It's all right, lamb," the nurse said soothingly. "He isn't going anywhere."

"I'm here," said Toby. "I'm—just looking out of the window." He swallowed hard, and added at random, "There's a funny little sliver of a house just opposite. About as broad as a stick of gum. I'm trying to figure out whether they get into it sideways, or how."

"Drink the rest," urged the nurse. "Miss Vau——Mrs. McLean I mean! I keep forgetting!

"Here," she added. "Just a tiny bit more."

"Isn't it almost gone?"

"Almost."

"I'm so tired of it," sighed Ann.

But she began on it again. In the silence, Toby remained at the window, fingering the cord that controlled the shade. The end of the cord was knotted and his fingers worked to undo the knot. He did not know it. He stared across at the sliver of a house, and did not see. He was thinking that Ann *was* glad he was here, she must be! The panic in her voice when she thought he was going . . .

But he said to himself in a minute more that that didn't mean anything either. She just wanted someone—someone or other—near.

He dropped the cord, and turned away from the window aimlessly. The bureau was before him, and there was a book tucked in among numerous vases. Something the nurse was reading. Or something the nurse was reading to Ann. He plucked it out, and saw the cover. "Siren." By Dwight Knowles.

Was that guy *still*——?

He did not finish the questioning thought, except by the leap of his glance towards Ann. He could not see her now. The nurse's plump form was between them. He looked down at the book again. "Siren." Never heard

of it, he thought. Must be a new one. He lifted the cover and, consciously ignoring the written inscription on the flyleaf, turned to the copyright page. "First printing, March, 1927. Second printing (before publication) March, 1927." Just out.

He remembered that Ann had read proof for Knowles on the train going West in December. This was the book, then.

"*There's a good girl!*" the nurse was exclaiming triumphantly. "Every last drop! Now—is there anything else you'd like?"

"No, thank you," said Ann. And she said, "Toby?"

"Yes, honey."

He shut the cover of Dwight Knowles' book and put it back where he found it. He had not looked again at the inscription on the fly-leaf. To read what Knowles had written there when Ann could not know he read it would seem a sneaking thing, an odious taking of advantage.

But the printed, official dedication he had seen.

It was:

TO

A. V.

who understands why.

CHAPTER TWENTY

DR. BEAUVAIS was big and stoop-shouldered and bald, with a wrinkling lofty forehead and bone-rimmed glasses. He had been operating that morning, and the smell of antiseptic and boiled cleanliness and ether clung to him still. He was in a hurry, but he did not seem to be. He sat crouched like a huge hunchback in an armchair with a desk before him, and provided Toby with cigarette after cigarette from a tortoise-shell case.

"Otherwise—" he said, shutting the case for the fifth time, "otherwise—she's perfectly well. Gastric symptoms entirely disappeared. No fever. She isn't sick. A little weak still, but that's all."

"Yes, I know."

"You'll be able to take her home tomorrow or the next day. Say tomorrow afternoon."

Toby looked up quickly. "As soon as that?"

There was fear in his voice, and protest. He wanted Ann to stay here. This great hospital . . . If they couldn't do anything for her *here* . . .

"Why not?" the doctor was answering. "She'll be happier at home. Not a bit of use in keeping her here any longer. As I say," he added, "there's no treatment, or anything of that sort. Just the tests I spoke of, that'll show us whatever improvement there may be as time goes on. You can bring her to my office for those. Physicians' Building."

"Physicians' Building," Toby repeated automatically.

"Recovery," said the doctor, "is always gradual in these

cases. Complete recovery is possible, but it doesn't happen over night. It may be some little time before we notice any change at all. That mustn't alarm you unduly."

His eyes were kind, paternal, behind his bone-rimmed glasses.

"All right, sir," Toby said, low.

"We have an instrument," the doctor continued, "called a perimeter, with which we make these tests. We hold it here, like this——" He held one forefinger erect before his eyes, "—while we introduce objects, color cards and so on, from the sides. There's a central blind spot, you understand. Mrs. McLean at present can't see anything placed directly in front of her, but she can distinguish large dark shapes at right and left. That's characteristic of this condition. It's a loss of function due to inflammation of the optic nerve. As it improves, there's a decrease in the central blind spot and an increase in the field of vision. Which is what we may hope to find happening—before very long.

"Now!" concluded the doctor.

He straightened and sat forward, folding his arms on the desk. "About taking her home," he said. "Is there someone there to look after her?"

Toby hesitated. His mind dismissed Missouri. Missouri could not read, nor talk with Ann, nor walk with her.

"Myself," he suggested, dubiously. Ann might veto that. He felt she would. And besides——

"You'll be busy," the doctor supplied, "of course."

"Yes," said Toby. His lips shut thin on the word, and his eyes narrowed. He would be busy.

"It's a woman's job anyway," opined the doctor matter-of-factly. If Toby's noticeable terseness had puzzled him, he gave no sign. "A combination companion and lady's maid is what you need," he said. Adding, "And

secretary. Someone who can take dictation. Your wife tells me she wants to keep on working."

Toby nodded. "I know."

There was a silence.

"You don't seem to approve," said the doctor then.

Toby made haste to alter his expression. "Yes I do," he said. "Of course, if she—if it'll make her feel better."

He said, "I was thinking of something else."

"There's no question but what it'll make her feel better. Give her something to think about—keep up her morale. As long as she doesn't overdo, I think it's an excellent thing."

Toby nodded again. Of course. Naturally. If Ann were not allowed to work, she would be desolate. One of her quiet philosophical utterances of the morning had been, "I'm glad I write. Suppose I were an artist? Or a sculptor?" . . .

She had talked a good deal this morning about work, and about getting back to it as soon as ever she should be permitted. Her determination had not surprised him. It was like her to want to keep on writing, come what might. But the fever of eagerness to be at it again *immediately*, the almost desperate anxiety and impatience he had sensed in her while she talked—that he had not anticipated. There was no hurry, surely. But it was as if Ann felt driven, pressed.

At first he had thought, "She's afraid they'll give her job away. Oh, the poor kid—as if they *would*!" He had been about to interrupt her with vigorous reassurances, when a sudden deeper perception had come. It wasn't her regular work that concerned Ann most. It was the outside work. Articles, stories, scenarios . . .

It was money.

The suspicion smote him like a missile, and conviction was the bruise it made. Starkly he realised. So often had he failed Ann that she no longer looked to him—at all, for anything. Not even now. She felt alone. She looked to herself alone. Now through inferno she said to herself, “I must make money. I must hurry and get stronger and make money to pay for this.”

Ann, on whom his punishment had fallen.

She said nothing aloud. She did not mention expenses, payments. His realisation was a guess; but that it was correct he could not doubt. It shattered him. Nothing that his mind could find alleviated the torment of the knowledge that he deserved this wholly. What had he ever done that should make Ann expect anything of him now? There was not one thing. There was only red ink on the ledger. He remembered her savings, never repaid. He had taken all she might have had.

And what could he say to her now, that would ease the pressure she felt upon her? It was appalling that she should worry and fret and scheme—but what could he *say*? He had nothing to offer but promises. The old promises. There was no way to tell her that the man who made them now was changed, was new.

Finally he had lied, that her mind might rest.

“Darling,” he had said, “listen: you’re not worrying about the bills or anything, are you? Because you mustn’t. I have money—for once. Enough to see us through this nicely.”

He had said, “I won five thousand on a horse in Florida.”

Because that, at least, she could believe of him . . .

It was of all these things he had been thinking just now, in the little silence. He had been reliving that zero hour when the doctor, with unwitting irony, observed, “You don’t seem to approve.” Now he put the recollection behind him, with an effort. It was going to be impossible,

he knew, to keep it behind him. Often and often in the weeks to come it would overtake him, possess him again, as it had just now. He did not know that—even as it had just now—it would each time forge his new strength stronger.

Now he rose. The interview was over. From the desk he picked up his hat and stood shaping the point of the dent in his fingers. There was one more thing he must find out.

“In these cases,” he said, “when—when they do completely recover——”

“Yes?”

“About how long does it ordinarily take?”

“Well,” said the doctor, “that’s rather hard to say.” He meditated and answered, “Perhaps two months.”

Two months.

“Then she—might be seeing again as well as ever, by—sometime in May?”

“It’s quite possible.”

Tobby nodded thoughtfully.

“I just wanted to have some idea,” he said.

§

At Ann’s suggestion, Janet Kramer was procured as her companion. This was Mrs. Janet Kramer, divorcée. Everybody called her Wink, for some forgotten reason, and she was sporadically a reviewer of books for the newspapers. She almost always liked the books she reviewed, and when she did not, she thought of the author, thinking, “Oh, well. Anyhow. Give him a break.”

She was thirty-four years old, and ten pounds overweight; a plump, good-natured, highly amused and amusing person. Ann was extremely fond of her, and Toby had pronounced her grand on the occasion of his first and, until now, only meeting with her. Mrs. Kramer had been

away for the past six months. She had spent the autumn in Reno, cheerfully divorcing her good friend Douglas Kramer, who wished to marry a more imperious lady.

The divorce granted, Janet had paused just long enough in New York to give a celebration party which Ann and Toby had attended, and during which the guest of honor, the released Mr. Kramer himself, had threatened at two in the morning to throw himself from a twelfth story window. He had been dissuaded; and Janet had sailed for London, Paris, the Riviera. . . .

She was just back. Beyond more book reviewing, she had no plans. She had not even an apartment, having sub-let hers until the first of June to a couple who were sorry, but adamant. Janet would love to come and stay with Ann and do whatever she could. She won Toby's heart during the talk they had about it.

She adored Ann; that was evident. She cried a little, then swore at herself for crying. "Damn it," she said. "I don't often blubber like this. But *why* do the terrible things always have to happen to the *precious* people?" . . .

She was to move from her hotel and live at Ann's apartment. When Ann and Toby discussed the matter in the hospital, before it was broached to Janet, Toby said, "And I'll get myself a room at the Brevoort."

The Brevoort was just around the corner.

"Because if Wink can come," he said, "you'll want her to stay, won't you? I mean, move in—not just come in in the daytime?"

What he meant was, "You don't want me there. *Do* you."

It went without saying that if Janet stayed, he would go elsewhere. The apartment was so very small.

He watched Ann's face intently. But it told him nothing. She appeared to consider, and presently she said,

"I don't see how we could ask her just to come in in the daytime, Toby. Wink is pretty hard up right now, I happen to know. Of course she won't accept anything from us—but if she stays at the apartment, she'll at least save what she spends now on hotel and board bills. It seems to me the least we can do is help her that way, when we're asking her to—do such a lot for me."

Toby thought, "That's the answer." Yet he was not as certain that Ann wanted him to go as he had been before she spoke. It seemed to him that her voice had been a little reluctant, regretful, as if she would find loopholes in her reasoning if she could.

Later she said, "Well, it's near. You can come over often."

"Oh, sure. I'll be in and out all the time."

"You'll probably be happier at the Brevoort," Ann said. "You'll feel—freer."

He thought she was apologising for discommoding him; so he did not refute what she said. "I'll be fine there," he said. "Don't you worry about me."

Then Ann was silent quite a little while.

Still later she asked him whether he was not returning to Florida, "—at all?"

"Oh, a year from now, I guess I am."

"Not this year?"

"No. They're sending someone else down," he told her. "A kid off the staff. Adams. He's leaving tonight."

"I'm sorry you did that," said Ann, "if you didn't want to."

"Of course I wanted to! I was fed up with the place," Toby said, to make it less pointed. "Besides, they wanted to send Adams down. They've been wanting to break him in on baseball. Brennan's going to quit, and they'll need another man. So it works out fine all around."

Last night, his first night back, he had arranged this. The paper had been, for once, amazingly kind. Fitzgerald had even said, "Take a few days off. Take a week. Nothing doing in sports now anyway." . . .

He started to tell Ann that he had been given a week's vacation; but he thought better of it. It was going to tax his ingenuity enough as it was, to explain his lack of leisure from now on.

He had already decided that he must not say, not to anyone, "I am writing a book." Ridiculous. Fatuous. "*Toby McLean says he's writing a book.*" "*Oh, ye-ah?*" Funny as hell.

No.

He must wait, and say at last, "The book I have written." He could wait. There was no jeer in his own mind, any more.

§

He moved to the Brevoort. His suitcase and typewriter and most of his possessions were out of the apartment by the following afternoon, when Ann came home. In their place there were the multitudinous effects of Mrs. Kramer, who had moved all morning long, shuttling back and forth in a taxicab between Ninth Street and Fifty-first. Missouri, now suddenly employed as a full-time, not a part-time maid, toiled like a slave. By evening the new régime was well begun.

That night Toby worked all night. From nine in the evening, when he left Ann and Janet, until dawn, he did at once the most sustained and the swiftest work of his life. He had been careful to choose a corner room, with the bath between it and the room next door. His typewriter would disturb no one. There was only a sample-room across the hall.

He had bought supplies. Plenty of yellow copy paper, pencils, a knife to sharpen them, a dictionary, a thesaurus, cigarettes, matches. He had bought additional typewriter ribbons also; and it occurred to him that tomorrow he'd better rent an extra typewriter, just to have here. If his own machine broke down he would lose hours—a whole night, even. He meant to work through many nights like this.

He was quiet deliberate, resolute. He did not pause to think what he would do; he began doing it. He knew without any conscious reflection at all, just what was to be done, and when, and in what order. It was as if these answers came to him before the questions.

His book would have twelve chapters; five or six thousand words to a chapter. Writing as fast as he could, not stopping now to rewrite or revise—not caring at all how ragged the stuff was—he would set down a chapter a day, for twelve days. Get it *down*. Have it *there*. Then he could polish it, trim it, fuss with it . . .

He wrote the first chapter that night between nine o'clock and one. Twenty pages. He had notes to work from. He had found them in the desk at the apartment, where Missouri had put them. (Missouri knew better than to ever throw any typewritten papers away.) He had found that they were headed:

SYNOPSIS FOR

A BOOK THAT WILL NEVER BE WRITTEN

by

Toby McLean

in almost illegible pencil-printing. His printing. He blacked the title out, soberly. But it was still there, and

so he retyped the page, to be rid of it. He was superstitious about things like that.

At one o'clock he gathered the first chapter in his hands, hit its edges on the desk to even them, and laid it away, with the notes, in the right-hand top drawer of the bureau. He did not read what he had written. He had no idea whether it was good or bad. He shut the drawer, and went to the telephone, and ordered a pot of coffee. He felt keyed up and keen and wide awake. He wanted to stay that way.

He took a cold shower and drank two cups of the coffee, black. He pulled a blanket around him, and opened a window. For a moment he hung out, looking down at the Avenue, up at the wan high stars. Then he banged the window and returned to the desk and sat down again . . . and rewrote, in full, the story called "Cabaret Lady."

It was quarter of six when he fell into bed. He slept instantly. He had meant to lie awake feeling pleased with himself for just a minute; but his fatigued system would not have it. Almost before his hands had drawn the bed-clothes up to his ears, the fingers relaxed, grew limp, were still.

§

The telephone woke him.

"This is Wink," said Mrs. Kramer. "You don't mean to tell me you're still *sleeping*?"

"Yeah, I was. What time is it? How's Ann?"

"Ann's fine. It's two o'clock, Lazy."

Toby was appropriately astounded and contrite. "No! Is it?"

"Pull yourself together," Janet said, "and come on over. We'll have some coffee for you—" She broke off. "Wait just a second."

There was a pause. Janet's voice was lowered carefully when he heard it again. "Look, Toby," she said. "Ann's all right, but she's awfully blue. We tried to work a little this morning, and it didn't go any too well. It's hard to dictate when you're not used to it——"

Listening, Toby nodded somberly. He had been afraid Ann might find it so.

"I thought I'd better call you," concluded Janet. "Ann said, 'No, let him sleep.' But I know she wants you."

He dressed in ten minutes. At least two minutes of the ten were spent in angry attempts to stop the copious bleeding of a razor-nick in the skin of his chin. He had known he would cut himself, shaving so fast. But he had had to shave. There was the chance that Ann might study his face with the tips of her fingers. Sometimes, every now and then, she did that.

When he was dressed he folded the new manuscript of "Cabaret Lady," folded it twice, and thrust it deep into his big overcoat pocket. He would take it to a typist before the day was over. The Symposium would have it tomorrow or the next day. If they still liked it——

He thought there was no reason why they shouldn't still like it. It was the self-same story, only better.

There was a fire in the studio fireplace at the apartment, and Ann was lying stretched on the divan in the warm glow. She was wearing the favorite bright Chinese pajamas he remembered; and she was smoking a cigarette. Somehow it did his heart enormous good that she was smoking. People who could not see never liked to smoke——hadn't he heard that? Commonsense told him that his exultation was groundless, really. Nevertheless it lingered. *Smoking!*

He perceived when he was beside her that she had wept not long ago, and that she was haunted still by her recent

failure—even frightened by it rather badly. She was sitting up now, having partly risen when she heard his voice. She held out her arms for him; it was the first time she had done that. Caught close, she clung to him, child-like, burying her face in his coat.

"I can't work," she said. "Toby. I can't. I tried and tried."

It was hard to console her. She did not protest the soothing logical things he found to say, but he felt that she hardly listened to them. The thing he said, for instance, about brand-new executives and what a time they had at first dictating the simplest letters: she didn't hear that. When he concluded, "But they get the trick, in no time!" she did not respond, except to say that she was sorry; she hadn't meant to make such a fuss.

"I'm all right now," she said presently.

She gave Toby her cigarette to dispose of, and leaned back again, against the pillows. "Wink?" she inquired.

"Wink's getting me some coffee. Do you want her?"

"No. Talk to me," said Ann.

She moved nearer the inside of the divan, that Toby, seated on the edge, might have more room. Her hands were clasped behind her head, the big sleeves of her pajama coat spread like bizarre bright wings above her shoulders. Toby said, "You're looking very gorgeous this morning." His voice was caressing. "Little heathen Chineese." . . .

He had mail for her. "I'll do better than talk," he said. "I'll read you two swell fat letters I found in the mailbox."

"For me?"

"Yeah. One's from your father——"

Her father was in Europe. "Oh," said Ann. "Written before——" She stopped.

"And the other's from California," Toby went on, as if he had not heard. "Los Angeles postmark—and a neat little thin sort of mincing handwriting."

"Oh!" said Ann. "That's—I think I know."

Toby thought he knew too. And in a way, he hoped he was right. If Knowles was in California, that was something.

He said helpfully, eyes on Ann's face, "It's a Hotel Ambassador envelope."

She nodded then. She held out her hand, not peremptorily at all, but simply; and Toby delivered the letter into it. He watched her fingers curl around the edge of the envelope. What would she do? Would she put it away for Wink to read to her later? She herself seemed uncertain. Her face was speculative; grave.

"Somebody—is in love with me," she said. "Toby. Does that make you angry?"

"Or doesn't it," she said, almost under her breath.

"Depends," answered Toby, as promptly and as lightly as he could. He had learned that he must answer promptly anything Ann said these days. Any hesitation puzzled and distressed her.

"Depends on who the somebody is and—how you feel about it," he said, "of course." He cleared his throat; dread was making his voice sound queer. "Do you want to tell me?" he suggested.

Ann's hands held the letter motionless now, between them. He took the left hand and folded it in both his. He waited. He thought, "This is it. This is why," over and over. This was why Ann had stopped caring. Dwight Knowles was why.

"I knew," he said suddenly aloud. "I knew—all the time."

He saw the swift puckering of Ann's forehead. "I knew this Knowles was in love with you," he explained. His voice was weary now. "That's who it is, isn't it? Dwight Knowles."

"The writer," said Ann.

Whether there was a certain little possessive pride in that, or whether he imagined it, he could not decide. He had not time, for listening again. Ann was telling him about Knowles. About meeting Knowles on the train going West. About seeing a great deal of him while she was out there, and about how sweet he had been to her, taking her places, helping her with stories, keeping her supplied with books and cigarettes and flowers . . .

She was talking about Dwight Knowles' own latest book, dedicated to her. "It isn't out yet. Comes out the twenty-seventh. There's an advance copy around here somewhere, that you can see. It's just initials in the dedication," Ann said conciliatingly. "Just 'To A. V.—,' not the whole name. I mean, I hope it won't—embarrass you, when it comes out. I didn't know he was going to do it. But there must be lots of A. V. s besides me."

"Is that all it says? Just, 'To A. V.?'?"

"'Who understands why,' it says."

"I see," said Toby.

He was sorry he had made her quote it to him. She was perturbed now, being unable to watch him, to know how he took it. He must make this easy for her, not doubly difficult. She had had enough distress today.

"Why, that's all right," he said, striving to speak naturally. "Why no, that won't embarrass me. Why should it? There must be lots of A. V. s, as you say. 'And anyhow——'" He forced an even lighter tone. "I think I ought to feel flattered that the Fair-haired Boy of American letters is wild about you!"

Ann said, "You don't mind." Not as if she inquired; but flatly, as if she had just learned it.

"People will always be falling for you," Toby said, "shoes over derby. I can't mind *that*." He hesitated. Ann's hand was still in both his, and he looked at it, playing with it, folding the unresisting fingers. "You haven't told me yet—how you feel about him," he reminded her.

"I don't know," Ann said.

"You don't know?"

"I'm not sure."

Toby nodded, as if someone's gaze were on him. His jaw tightened, and a vein showed in his temple, blue and knotted. "I see," he said again.

Janet chose this inopportune moment to bang through the swinging door from the kitchen, carrying a plate of toasted rolls and a coffee percolator and calling something back to Missouri about sugar and cream as she came. "Do you want——" she began, addressing Toby.

He glanced up dully. Afterward he remembered that Janet was there, that she halted there, and then that she turned and went back through the swinging door again, murmuring that she had forgotten something. At the time he was too preoccupied to be really aware.

"Did she go?" Ann whispered.

"Yes."

There was a pause.

"You're not sure—whether you're in love with him or not," said Toby then.

Ann appeared to choose her rejoinder carefully. "I like him," she said. "I suppose I could be in love with him, if—if I tried."

Toby thought, "If she'd let herself, that means."

"He's very goodlooking," Ann said. "And—glamorous. And I like his mind. He has a grand mind."

Toby was silent.

"*Say something!*" Ann implored him finally. It was an outburst. "Ask me questions! How can I go on talking and talking when I can't see you and you won't even *speak?*"

"I'm sorry," he said. "I was just sort of thinking it over." He mustn't do that. He must say things, ask her questions . . .

"Does he know you're married?" he asked.

"Of course."

"I just wondered. He doesn't use your married name."

"He knows it, though."

"Well," said Toby tentatively.

In a minute he said, "Well, what does he want you to do? Divorce me and marry him?"

A little spasm, as of distaste for the bluntness of that, passed over Ann's face. But her reply was as blunt. "That's what he wanted me to do when I was in California. Whether he still will, when he hears what's happened to me——"

She shrugged. "That remains to be seen."

Toby could have wept then. He could have shouted out, "Why, God damn him! If he *doesn't*——" But he only said quite quietly, holding Ann's hand very tight for a moment, "Of course he will. How could that make any difference? And you'll be all right again anyway by the time he gets back to New York. He's not coming for a week or two, is he?"

"He's not coming till the first of May."

Toby carried it through. "Well, then, what are you worrying about?" he said gently, as to a little sister. "You know you're going to be perfectly fine by them."

"I wasn't worrying," said Ann. "Not—not the way you mean."

"I should hope not. This fellow *loves* you, doesn't he?"

"I don't mean that," Ann said. "I——Where're you going?"

Toby had released her hand, and risen. "Just looking for a cigarette," he managed to say. It was not true. He had stood up because to sit still was impossible any longer, writhing inwardly this way. He put an elbow against the mantelpiece, and the fingers of his spread hand plowed his hair and stopped, arrested. In the shadow of his arm his face was like the face of one who cannot get his breath—twisted, with the clenched teeth bared. When in a moment he had hold of himself a little, he ducked his head and wiped the sweat from his forehead on his sleeve.

His hand dropped down. He turned. He was controlled now.

"I guess you smoked the last one," he said to Ann.

"Aren't there any?"

"I don't see any."

He sat down again. Her hand was lying where he had left it, and he laid it between his two hands again. "Sweet," he said, "listen: I'm not going to ask you to tell me now—what you want to do. I don't think you know, and I don't think this is any time for you to be trying to decide. I want you to *wait*, and not worry, and not even think about it any more than you can help—and let Toby look after you, till you're better. Then when you're all well again, and everything's fine, and Knowles is back—then it will be whatever you want. If you decide you're in love with him, and you want a divorce—we'll fix it up."

"You would give me one?" Ann breathed.

"If you wanted one."

"You wouldn't *mind*?"

His face broke again. But Ann could not see that.

"I want you to be happy, is all," he said.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

IT might have defeated him. The Toby McLean he had newly become was aware that it would have defeated the Toby he had been. Once—even so short a time as a week ago—he would have thought he had to drink to bear this. There was a little while now when he thought he might have to. But he did not drink. In the back of his mind was the consciousness that if he got through this unaided, he could get through anything. He would be master. The boast he had always made—"I can take liquor or let it alone"—would at last, and for once and for all, be true.

It was a struggle; but not a prolonged one. When he left Ann that afternoon he thought that he had never needed a drink so terribly. Descending the stairs from the apartment, emerging onto the sidewalk, he thought that. He knew three speakeasies within two blocks of here.

It was below zero. He turned up his collar and punched his fists into his overcoat pockets, feeling the manuscript safe under the knuckles of the left one. He walked to the subway, passing two of the speakeasies on the way. He rode uptown, and left the manuscript at a typing bureau. "And two carbons. Can you have it by tomorrow afternoon?" His lips were dry and thick. He felt gone inside. "Shot to hell," he thought. "Judas! What wouldn't I give——"

He thought that perhaps when he had done the little job he had to do now for Ann, he would yield, he would

go back to his hotel room, and shut himself in, and drink and drink. He had whiskey there, in his room. Shorty's quart from St. Petersburg, still unopened, was there. Even as Shorty had, Missouri had packed it without consulting him. People were always taking his weakness for granted. Well. He had never had more justification for it than he had now.

But he must wait. First he must go and see the new picture at the Capitol for Ann, and write her a column. He had promised. He went to the Capitol. He found that waiting was not as hard as he had thought it would be, since it was for Ann's sake. He could even almost concentrate on the picture, for her sake. The review he would write would be signed By Ann Vaughn. It had to be good.

When he had seen the picture, returned to his room and written the column, he knew quite suddenly that the struggle was over. He had not opened Shorty's quart. He would not now. This particular bit of work for Ann was finished; but the long work he must do, that Ann might be cared for, that she might be comfortable while she was his—perhaps always—— That was hardly begun. He couldn't stop now. He couldn't do anything that would stop him even for a little while. He discovered that he did not even want to.

He had won. He devised a curious method of signalizing his victory. He set Shorty's bottle on the desk behind his typewriter, and sometimes during that evening's hours and hours of diligence he bowed to it and thumbed his nose at it.

Once he addressed it. He had just taken the final page of the second chapter of his novel from the typewriter, and he was rather happy. He bowed to the bottle. "Knowles," he said to it. "*That* for you!"

In the days immediately ensuing he warned himself time and time again that his speed couldn't last—he couldn't hope to be able to keep this pace up. Nobody could. It was prodigious, superhuman, and sooner or later it would slacken. There was a limit to what even a man possessed as he was possessed could do. There was an ultimate exhaustion, even for one who had rested all the twenty-six years of his life, for this.

But it was not yet. He thought it well to predict to himself the inevitable slump, that he might be stoical and undismayed when it should come. In the meantime he created like a machine, rapidly, tirelessly, through long hours and very many of them. For a week he averaged eight thousand words a day. In one day, working fourteen hours almost without a break, he wrote eleven thousand words—the fifth chapter of his novel, in rough; part of the sixth; and a short short-story two thousand words in length, which he called "The Sophomore and the Siren."

He had heard that Varsity, a magazine of college fiction, was paying four hundred dollars apiece for two-thousand-word stories.

His novel was daily his first consideration. Only after he had fattened the manuscript accumulating in the bureau drawer by twenty whirlwind pages or more—the uncorrected chapter for the day—could he turn his mind to other production. Even then it was sometimes difficult. The novel fascinated him, and he was reluctant always to set it aside. But the novel was a gamble, a far shot; for quick and sure returns, short things must be written. And well written. He took pains with the short things, revising as he went along. He would turn out the rough draft of a chapter in three hours, and spend the whole next hour on a single paragraph of a short story.

He was not the first to learn the soundness of the doc-

trine that the more you have to do, the more you can do. By cutting down on sleep and avoiding companionship almost altogether, he seemed to have time enough for everything. In the midst of his own work he wrote three more columns for Ann that first week. She was adapting herself slowly to the necessity of composing aloud, but her fund of ideas and material for daily stories was low and she had no way of replenishing it.

She said after a few days that she would have to resign from the paper—temporarily, at least. "This is impossible," she said. "I see now." But she felt so very badly that Toby knew she must not be permitted to resign actually, whatever happened.

He talked with Williams, her managing editor, who in turn had a talk with Ann, and it was arranged that she should call these next few weeks her annual vacation. The job would be waiting when she was ready to return to it. "And listen, young lady!" Williams growled quite realistically. "Don't you dare come around asking me for three weeks off this summer, either! Because you won't get 'em."

All the world was doing its best for her in ways like that. She had streams of callers every day. Unless Toby dropped into the apartment in the morning, when Ann was working, he almost never saw her with fewer than five or six people around. Conversation would be general then, and he would have no opportunity to talk with her alone. He never stayed long, though he came often. As he had predicted, he was in and out.

When his week's leave of absence from the office ended, the necessity of appearing there every evening and doing whatever there was to do, interfered somewhat with his program, but not greatly. Sports assignments in New York in March were easy and few; and nine of the Star's

sports writers were in town. Oftener than not, Toby had time on his hands at the office. He used it. He could turn out the next thousand words there as well as anywhere.

"Letter," he would answer briefly, when someone asked what he was writing.

Sometimes inquirers peered over his shoulder, and this answer would not serve. In such emergencies he covered the typewritten lines with his sleeve, not too pretentiously, and turned a quizzical face, one eyebrow lifted. He meant to be casual about it, he never intended to remind people that as one dwelling close to tragedy these days he was a man apart, upon whom they should not intrude in the old easy way. But they were reminded, always, despite him. "Sorry," they always mumbled, becoming uncomfortable, backing away.

It would have helped if one of them had said some rude fraternal thing—"Go to hell," for instance—genially, as of old.

He sold two stories almost at once. The Symposium welcomed "Cabaret Lady," and paid the five hundred dollars originally offered. The editors of *Varsity* did not like "The Sophomore and the Siren," but they liked the style of it; would Mr. McLean let them see something else? He wrote, in a day, two more stories of the requisite short length and they bought one, entitled "Junior Prom." The other he sent to a magazine in Chicago, where it languished a while.

In the meantime he submitted "The Sophomore and the Siren" to his friend Miss Holmes on the Symposium. Again it was turned down—it was too short and too collegiate for this market—but over the telephone Miss Holmes suggested that there was a perfectly marvelous movie in it. Had Toby thought of that? The movie producers, said Miss Holmes, were yipping for good college

stories just now. Had Toby an agent? Well, he ought to have. This was a job for an agent.

"I'll tell you what," Miss Holmes decided. "I'll give this copy I've got here to Arnold Mercer. You know who he is? Excellent agent. Handles some of the very biggest people." She rattled off names. "He's a sort of cousin of mine," she concluded, "but that musn't be held against him. He can sell this thing for you, if anyone can. And for a nice price."

"I could use it," said Toby.

He had talked to Miss Holmes as to a favorite aunt, days ago in her office. She knew much about his present situation.

"Sure," he agreed now. "That'll be fine—if he's willing to bother."

"He will be," said Miss Holmes.

The story went to Arnold Mercer. Toby met him, and made up his mind at once that here was his agent. "If he'll take my stuff," he thought, "it's as good as sold." He was aware that Mercer could afford to be selective as to clients; and Mercer's immediate interest in his work encouraged him mightily. This was no favor to Miss Holmes; this was genuine interest. "You can *write*," said Mercer. And he said, "Got anything else in the trunk? If you have, dig it out. Bring it over."

They discussed the novel, and Toby went away fired with new resolve. Mercer would help him. Merely knowing that that dynamic little man was his ally would make him work harder. Furthermore, he very much liked the idea that he had an agent. It seemed to establish him definitely as an author. "I'm not fooling," was the way he put it.

He liked realising that anew, and again and again.

Of the nine hundred dollars he received from the two sales he made himself, he retained in his possession twenty-two dollars and sixty-five cents. The money was not his; and as soon as he got it he paid it to people. He had borrowed a hundred from Hastings to cover Ann's bill at the hospital. He reimbursed Hastings. The boys in St. Petersburg, through Shorty, had lent him a hundred and seventy-seven dollars for the journey North. He mailed Shorty a check for the amount, plus an additional thirty-five cents, which he recalled having snatched from Shorty's chiffonier to tip a bell boy.

Six hundred-odd dollars were left. He considered paying Dr. Beauvais a few hundred on account; but he decided against it. He knew a happier thing to do.

At the bank next morning he loaded his pockets with six hundred new, uncreased, one-dollar bills. It felt like a lot. He wanted it to feel like a lot in Ann's fingers. He took it to her, saying that here was part of the fifteen hundred he owed her. "About a third of it. And I'll pay back the rest—as soon as I see what Beauvais is going to charge. Will that be okay?"

He did not say that he had sold two stories. He wanted to; for his own gratification he longed to tell Ann where the money came from. But she was so depressed these days over repeated failures—it seemed unkind to mention his success. What of it, anyway? he thought. He had no handicap, no odds against him.

"This is some of what you won on the horses," Ann observed rather than asked.

"Yeah," Toby said. "Some of that."

Now he began to devote all his time to his novel. The first draft was done. The rewriting would go much more slowly. This he knew, even while he felt that there were

pages and pages, whole scenes, that in the end would stand almost as they were written.

His first draft was surprisingly close to the mark. Until it was finished, he had not read it over, for fear its various deficiencies and general imperfections might stop him dead. But he had discovered, going over the whole thing finally one evening, that its deficiencies were remediable, and that in general it was rather fine than otherwise.

He was not certain. He did not dare to believe that the thing was as good as he felt it was. He told himself that it couldn't possibly be that good—this original script, written so rapidly and so carelessly, without any pondering or planning at all. That his mind had conceived the story months before, and that his subconscious mind had developed it in the meantime, he understood; and there was his newspaperman's facility of expression. But these things did not explain nor prove the merit he thought he recognized in this achievement. Here and there he found a passage so fine that it startled him.

"Did *I* write that?" he thought, incredulous—afraid that he might have read it somewhere long ago, and yet aware that he had not, that it was his own.

He had a fortnight more of comparative freedom. Then April would have begun, the ball clubs would have arrived from the South, and the long season of daily games to cover and of whole weeks at a stretch on the road with the Yankees would commence. If the book was not done by then, there was no telling how long it might take him. And—primarily important—what about Ann? He couldn't leave her.

He could quit the *Star*. In his heart he knew he was going to do exactly that; but whenever the knowledge emerged he argued with it, for caution's sake. "Whoa, there, McLean! Better not—yet. Wait till you're sure

you can make a living this way. Nine hundred dollars in two weeks is heavy sugar—but don't get the idea you're a four-hundred-and-fifty-dollar-a-week man. You may not sell another story till hell freezes. How do you know?"

Well. Anyway. He had two weeks more. The thing to do, he said to himself, was work while he could; and then *see*.

At the end of the first of the two weeks, Part One of his novel—it was in four parts—was pronounced complete by the author. This was the best he could do. He had it typed, and gave it to Arnold Mercer. "You can tell from this," he said. His face was quite white. "If it's no good—just say so. Don't let me kid myself. If it hasn't a chance, I'd rather know it now."

He did not hear from Mercer for several days. It was queer, he thought. Mercer had promised to read Part One that evening. That was Wednesday. Nothing happened on Thursday. Nothing on Friday. Nothing Saturday morning. Now he must wait until Monday, at least. It was hard to keep on working, not knowing. During business hours he jumped when the telephone rang. He would have telephoned Mercer—but what would be the use? Mercer had said, "I'll let you know as soon as I've read it."

Mercer called him finally late Monday afternoon. "I thought you wouldn't believe me when I told you what a book it is," he explained, "so I got you an option on it—from the livest publishers in the business, to my mind. Christopher, Lowe. Lowe read it over the weekend. Just called me. He's shouting about it. Now listen here: when can we have the rest?"

It was great news. It was simply marvelous. He tried to tell Mercer how glad he was about it; but he thought afterward that he hardly did the subject justice. There

was something else so much more marvelous today. "Lord, if this isn't a *day*—!" he exulted through the telephone. "You know what's *happened*?"—

This afternoon, an hour ago, in Dr. Beauvais' office, Ann had told the red card from the black one.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WHEN in time she could see the green card, and the blue, and even the yellow card—when she knew the shape at her side, whether it was Janet, whether it was Toby—then she began herself to believe the miracle of her recovery. She was the last to surrender doubt and fear. She said to Janet after her initial triumph, “Don’t tell Toby: but I’m not a bit sure I’m any better. It seems to me that I could have guessed that red card, all along.

But presently there was no mistaking her improvement. Now the darkness was a mist, and the mist was thinning, dissipating. . . . Suddenly she let herself be joyous. She stopped trying to work. She could rest, and wait, now that waiting would end. She was a different Ann, a laughing Ann playing blindfolded. Everything was different. Things that had been heartbreaking—miscalculations, gropings—were funny now. She who had been so sensitive about her helplessness, now called amused attention to it. “Oh, I’m lost again! Who moved the door? Somebody steer me!”

Now she wanted diversion, gaiety, noise; parties in the evening; all the new jazz records for the phonograph. She wanted to go out. She had hated to appear on the streets, “—and be led around,” she explained now. She did not mind any more. “You wouldn’t mind being mistaken for a cripple,” she told Toby, “if you knew yourself you only had a broken leg. . . .”

Toby was one of her friends. As nearly as he could make out, that had become her attitude about him. She

was glad when he dropped in. She was glad when Eunice dropped in, or Norma Drake, or Nick Standish, or Shorty, back from Florida,—or anyone she liked. Because he was busier than ever now, and because there was always a crowd there anyway, Toby's visits of late had diminished in number to one a day, and that a brief one; but Ann, far from complaining as he had secretly hoped she might, seemed unaware.

"Oh, do you have to go?" she asked lightly when he said he must. She did not even protest, as to Nick or Shorty, "But you just *got* here!"

Once, when he had the rare good fortune to find her alone, she queried idly, smiling at him. "Having a good time these days, Toby?"

"Oh, all right," he said.

"I thought you must be."

So she had missed him. Or at least, she had noticed his neglect. He could not think that she had really missed him, in the sense of caring one way or the other. Her remark was a pleasantry, that was all.

"I'm working pretty hard," he said. Whether she cared or not, he wanted her to understand that work, not diversion, was keeping him away.

"I know," Ann assented. "Of course you are."

She inquired, as she always did with friendly interest, what he was writing now. "Another story?"

"Yes," he said. He always said yes.

He had quit the Star summarily during the second week in April, for the purpose, he had told Ann, of "trying fiction." He had informed her beforehand; and in order that she might not think the project too wild and risky, he had announced the stories sold already. There had been, by that time, a third sale to enumerate. American Pictures, Incorporated, had purchased the motion picture rights to

his college story, for twenty-five hundred dollars, just the day before.

"So," he had said to Ann, "maybe I'll make out all right—if the luck holds. Try it, anyway. If I flop, I can always get a job again."

Ann had been extraordinarily sweet, he thought, that day. She had taken the trouble to pretend an excitement that it seemed to him she could not possibly have felt, over his few sales. "Toby McLean!" she kept exclaiming breathlessly. "You didn't! Aren't you *tickled*?" She kept wailing, "And you never told me!"

Her fervor—because he was sure it was artificial—rather shamed and hurt than gratified him. It was sweet of her; but he wished she wouldn't. He wanted to say, "Never mind, Ann, honey. Please don't bother." She was only sorry for him: did she think he didn't know that? Did she think he didn't know how pitiful his tiny start must look, ranged against Dwight Knowles' whole great career?

"It isn't anything," he mumbled diffidently several times. The tendency was to minimize it, to be deprecatory about it, thinking of Knowles. He said, "One story was old, and the other two were little short ones." He said finally, "I wish you'd save the flowers till I *do* something!——"

He did not say a word about his book. He nearly did on that occasion; but he held his tongue. The news that he had all but finished a novel, and that a publisher had taken an option on it, would, he felt, make up in some degree the mortifying disparity between Ann's rapture and its present cause. The temptation to tell her, then and there, was strong.

But even stronger was his desire to make the announcement of the novel impressive—as impressive as it could be. That meant waiting until it was accepted, and the contract signed. He had waited this long; he could wait a

little longer. After all, a mere vague option on a novel—against Knowles' five published novels—was pathetically inadequate again.

Now it was May. The novel was finished, and Christopher, Lowe and Company had a full copy. They had had it only a few days, and hadn't reported yet. Toby thought satirically, "I suppose I'm on the well-known tenterhooks, whatever they are." Queer, that he wasn't. He had no sense of suspense, no anguish, no insomnia, on the score of the novel, now that it was done. A sort of fatalistic torpor had descended upon him, a vast apathy as to the verdict. This was protective; but he did not know it. He knew only that the book was gone, it was out of his hands; though he tried, he could not worry now about it.

Knowles was back in town. Ann had not said so—since the day of their talk about him, Knowles had not been mentioned between them—but Toby knew he was back. There had been a line in Winchell's column, several days ago. There had been a paragraph yesterday in Nick Standish's column in the *Star*. Perusing the paragraph, Toby had noted that Nick had been talking to Knowles somewhere. At Ann's? The squib was a thumbnail interview.

He had been dreading these days of Knowles' reappearance a long time now. They were agonising days. He had known they would be. He spent them for the most part in his room, moping in his hotel room, pacing, and smoking cigarettes in a chain, and staring at nothing, as he had pictured himself idiotically doing. For four days he kept away from Ann's apartment. He had planned to. He didn't want to run into Knowles—not yet, anyway—and he wanted to give Knowles a little time. That was only fair. That was only fair to Ann, and all of them.

He himself had had time. He had had weeks; and what had he done, he thought dismally now, to strengthen his

own position? He had done nothing but work. He had neglected Ann, in work's favor. This had seemed unavoidable; but now he thought it had been a grave, perhaps a disastrous, mistake. No matter how hard he worked nor what progress he made, it would be years—if ever—before he could outstrip Knowles professionally. He should have entered this competition, not as a writer, but as a person—as an attentive and thoughtful and entertaining suitor of Ann's. That had been his single chance, he saw now. "And I *muffed* it!"

Here was something to worry about. Here was anguish and suspense in plenty. Compared with the decision Ann was making—perhaps had already made—the publishers' yes or no on the novel was inconsequential. When, on the fourth day of his moping and stalking alone in his room, he heard from Mercer that it was yes—the book was taken—he was still wretched. All well and good; but what about Ann? *What about Ann?* What would it profit him to have his name on the front of a book, if he had nothing else in a ruined world?

That evening, all at once, he could not bear it any longer. He wouldn't question her if he could help it; but he had to see her, to be where she was. He went around to the apartment. He thought when he rang the doorbell marked "Toby McLean—Ann Vaughn McLean," that Knowles might be there. He thought, "I don't care if he is." Then he thought very suddenly and very shatteringly that the bell might not be answered, and that if it was not answered it would not mean that Ann was out. Ann did not yet go out of evenings. His heart stopped while he listened for the clicking of the latch.

When it came, he was ashamed. Shame made him red and miserable. "You louse," he said to himself. "You low-down dirty rotten hound—you *knew better*."

Going up the stairs he found that his fists must have clenched a moment ago. The nails had bitten four half-moons in each palm.

There was a party. He could hear it from the second landing on—chatter and laughter, the piano going and voices singing. He continued up. It didn't matter that there was a party. He wasn't here to try to talk to Ann, just to be near her. This he kept telling himself severely, as an admonition. He was afraid that if he had half an opportunity he was going to ask her what the answer was; and he did not want to. If she knew, she would tell him. If not, he should not hurry her.

Knowles wasn't present. That was the first thing his quick glance learned. Everybody was a friend. Janet was there, of course, and Harriet Cottle, and Nick and Bee Standish. Bee was playing the piano, and she and Bugs McDonald were singing. Harry Griffin was there, and the Atwaters, Janet's brother and sister-in-law. And Ann. Nobody else at all.

His entrance brought everybody crowding around. He was, said everybody, such a stranger. They were glad to see him. They laid welcoming hands upon him, and asked him where under the sun he had been? Where keeping himself? Was he working hard? How was free-lancing? Several of them averred that they had not seen him for weeks.

"Ann!" somebody turned to call. "It's the boy-friend——"

"I know," Ann, across the room, said lightly. "Hullo, Toby."

She had not come with the rest flocking to greet him. She had paused to put out a cigarette in an ash-tray. She came unhastily now, smiling placidly toward him; her eyes smiling straight toward his face. Faces were visible

new to her. They were hardly even blurry. She would be reading, "—and threading needles!" Beauvais said—in a little while more.

Toby started to meet her. In the two steps it took, he had time to see that she was adorable in a little powder-blue sleeveless dress with a cape. "Hullo," he said again, taking her hands and ducking his head to kiss her quickly. He hoped she would not mind that. People were looking, and would expect it.

"How are you?" he said.

"Fine."

Probably only Janet, of the eight or nine spectators, was aware that days had elapsed since Toby's last visit. Ann and he instinctively were careful to comport themselves as if they had seen each other not longer ago than this afternoon.

They drifted apart now, Ann to seize Bee Standish by the arm and pull her back again to the piano, Toby to answer Harry Griffin, who wished to know, for the third time, how the fiction-writing was going.

"Going all right, I guess."

"Sold anything since I saw you last?"

Toby thought, "Only a novel," with the first real flash of pleasure he had felt. Lord, it was *true*! But he did not say it. From Harry, by the loud immediate public proclamation Harry would make, was no way for Ann to learn about it.

"No," he said. "Nothing since then."

"Oh, well," Harry consoled him. "That's only been a couple of weeks."

The group at the door had scattered, and those present were resuming the several idle pastimes interrupted by Toby's arrival. He was commanded to come and regard a game of anagrams in which the Atwaters and Harriet

Cottle and Janet were engaged. Obediently he sat for a while on the arm of Janet's chair, simulating interest in the lengthening, shifting words and the stray letters on the card table.

Actually, in repeated swift flights of his glance toward the piano, he was watching Ann. Her profile was toward him; she was seated on the near end of the bench beside Bee, who was playing again while a trio composed of herself and McDonald and Harry harmonised. Ann merely smoked and listened, and approved between selections. Her singing voice was an affectionate joke among her friends, being a funny child-like little voice, very clear and sweet, but given to the strangest innocent deviations from tune and key.

"Sing, Ann," Toby heard Bugs McDonald urge her now. He smiled broadly, and Ann dimpled up at him. "Help us out here," said McDonald. "How about it?"

"With my bronchitis?"

"Oh, is *that* what it is?"

On the shelf of the piano above the lower end of the keyboard an enormous vase of transparent amber glass contained at least two dozen very gorgeous long-stemmed roses. In intervals of watching Ann, Toby eyed these. They were not quite fresh. They must have come several days ago—the day Knowles came, for instance, or the next day. They were full-blown now, and shedding occasional petals on the piano. Toby thought, "She'll have to throw them out tomorrow." He thought dourly, "And that will be all right with me."

He wondered what he was doing here, exactly. There didn't seem to be any sense in it. Ann had apparently forgotten his presence altogether; not once in a quarter of an hour had she looked his way. And here he sat, on

the sidelines of an assinine anagram game. Was it for this he had come stalking up here?

He gave the card-table and the little lettered blocks upon it a sudden indignant glare, and got to his feet. He was conscious as he did so that Janet's eyes lifted, and as he moved away he felt them follow. Commiserating, were they? Saying optically, "Poor Toby?" Or—not. They would be knowing eyes, of course. Janet would know.

He did not turn his head. He strolled on. By a devious rambling route, as if he had no destination in mind, he was on his way to the piano. He halted and leafed through a magazine on the table. He crossed to the divan and over the back of it, leaning on his folded arms, held momentary converse with Nick Standish, who was pensive there. Toby thought, "I'll ask him about interviewing Knowles——" But it was a thought only. He did not ask.

He arrived, finally. The trio at the piano was singing, "Where's That Rainbow?" and Ann was listening, still not chiming in. Her knees were crossed, and the free foot in its gray satin pump picked to the rhythm. When Toby stopped beside her, the foot stopped. Ann glanced up swiftly.

"Oh," she observed, without expression.

Her smile was the merest flickering of her lashes, and the slightest possible tremor of her lips. She looked down again, at a cigarette package she held in her hands. Even in his preoccupation, Toby wondered how well she could see it. How much better was she than she was four days ago?

This while his mind was busy with the distinct impression he had now that Ann was caught unarmoured, off her guard. He did not know how he knew—but he

knew quite certainly that she would have had ready her bright, shallow, careless smile, if she had been apprized of his approach before he reached her.

Intuition added that she had been thinking about him just then. But the fact was unimportant. Thinking *what?*

She told him. Under cover of the music, she said, "I was just wondering if you were going to watch anagrams all evening."

He didn't quite hear it. He bent over until his head was close to Ann's, until his senses partook of the perfume she used. Ann repeated her remark.

"But I wasn't," Toby said. "I was watching you. And wondering if you'd be annoyed if I came over."

"How absurd."

"Was it?" he queried. "I couldn't tell."

The final chord of "Where's That Rainbow?" interrupted them. "Play that again," Toby said at once. "That's great."

"Where's your banjo?" Bee demanded.

"At the hotel."

"Go get it," said Harry. "Or let me have your key, and I will."

Toby shook his head. "Two of the strings are gone."

The banjo was here, and in good condition. But Ann did not give him away. The music began again, and again he leaned down for conversation. He could not sit down, unless he sat on the floor beside the bench. He would have to look up at her from there, like a suppliant. "Not so good," he thought. So he leaned, hands over his knees, like a ball player.

Ann waited, fingering the cigarettes.

"How've you been?" he asked her, after an attempt to think of something better. "I haven't seen you for three or four days."

"I know that," said Ann.

Her sharpness was unmistakable. Again he knew that she was unguarded, now, for once; her barriers of unconcern let down. Then it hadn't been a genuine unconcern? She *cared* what he did! "Hold everything," he thought, to the upward surging in his mind. "Maybe not."

Knowles. . . .

He said, "Well, of course you knew why I was staying away."

"No," said Ann. She looked at her hands again. "It might have been any one of several reasons."

"It might have been nothing of the kind!"

Ann was silent.

Toby said, "Knowles got back on Tuesday, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"You knew that was why."

Ann looked at her hands. "But this is Saturday," she said. The hands fluttered a little, and she locked them firmly around the cap of her knee. "And you didn't even telephone," she said. "Which seemed to prove conclusively that you weren't interested—at all—in whether or not his coming back meant anything to me."

"I wasn't *interested*?"

He had forgotten to keep his voice down. Above the song, the singers must have heard it. "Here," Toby muttered agitatedly, grabbing Ann's wrist. "We'll dance." He had to get her away, and this was the first idea that occurred to him.

Ann did not demur. She accompanied him to a plot of unoccupied floor, and allowed herself to be seized by the waist and the hand.

Solemnly they began an able though an absent-minded fox trot.

"Look here!" Toby's undertone was savage in its earnestness. "I just want to say this: not only have I been 'interested' these past few days—I've been as near off my noodle as a supposedly sane man can get." He executed a deft twirl, continuing as he did so, "But I didn't telephone, or come over, because I thought you'd rather I'd wait. After all, you had to have time to make up your mind."

"No," Ann murmured.

"What?"

"I mean, I didn't have to have all that time."

Toby held her a little off from him, so he could see her face. He could see nothing that answered him. Her eyes were hidden.

"Then you've decided," he said in a strained voice.

Ann's nod of affirmation was very slow to come. They stepped twice around the little space before he saw it.

"Sort of," she said. "I've decided about Dwight. I—haven't quite decided about you, yet."

Then Toby stopped dancing altogether, unaware that he did. He still held Ann around the waist, and by the hand. He still stared.

"You turned him down," he said huskily. It was quite plain. He said it again in a different version, loving to say it. "You sent him away." Then his eyes darkened. "Well, then *why*——"

"Let's sit somewhere," Ann said abruptly. "We don't have to dance. This is ridiculous."

All at once they realised that it was. Toby's arms dropped, and Ann turned and led the way across to the window seat. There was no one very near there; but the spot was within everyone's plain view. They sat down. Then Toby stood up again, and again pulled Ann up by

the wrist. "No, not here," he groaned, *sotto voce*. "Damn all these people!"——

He hesitated, looking about him wild-eyed for isolation. There was no such thing in the studio. The bedroom was Janet's now. There was only the kitchen. Thither he marched, big and grim, towing small Ann. She went submissively; even—though Toby, ahead, did not know it—mirthfully.

The exit was by no means unobserved. "To the guillotine?" inquired Nick Standish, when Toby was half way. He saw tardily then that they were all watching, with amusement. It was too late to do anything but carry it off as best he could. He essayed a cheerful grin.

"Yeah," he said, and indicated Ann to them with his head. "*Sic semper tyrannis.*"

But when the kitchen door swung shut behind him, he was doubly grim, desperately grim. "Tell me what you mean," he said at once, as if Ann had just spoken. The minutes that had intervened did not exist for him. "What do you mean, you haven't decided about me yet? You don't want him—you don't want *either of us*, is that it? Even with Knowles eliminated—I lose out. Is that what you mean?"

"Not so loud," Ann implored him.

"Well, *answer me!*"

They stood facing each other, between the door and the painted cupboard. A clock was ticking; Toby remembered that later; and in the other room the piano was momentarily still. Ann was close to him. She was scrutinising him, her face tilted up slightly. Her eyes shone, and the line of her mouth was soft.

"I can see you," she murmured happily, as if to herself. "I couldn't—that other time."

"I'm glad," Toby said. The significance of any but her first four words was lost on him. This remarking of her improvement seemed irrelevant, just now. "Tell me!" he persisted.

"You tell *me* something!" said Ann.

Still he was dull, his insight dulled by concentration on one single thought. He said wearily, "Anything you want to ask me."

Then Ann laughed outright, softly, exultantly. "Goofy!" she cried. "Tell me you're still in love with me! I know it—now—but I've been thinking you weren't for such *ages*——"

Out of his profound bewilderment Toby began. "You've been thi——" But he ceased.

Words, explanations, could come later.

"You see," said Ann, "first, I thought perhaps you were just sorry for me, because I was blind. I mean, how could *I* know? When we'd been separated so long? You didn't say anything, or do anything, that I hoped you'd do and say. And I couldn't see you. How could I *tell*? Then when I tried to use poor Dwight's unrequited passion——" She dimpled: "—which he'll snap out of almost any day now——"

"I don't believe it!"

"Yes he will. He's not the pining type," said Ann. "Wait till you meet him. Anyway——"

"Am I going to meet him?"

"Of course! You'll like him."

"Oh, I'll just adore him!" Toby mimicked. "He and I'll be just like that," he said, extending two fingers together.

"Or like that," he added, giving the air a fast poke with his fist.

"Silly!" Ann called him lovingly.

She was kissed again. She was being kissed a good deal.

They were still in the kitchen. They had been there, away from their guests, for twenty minutes or more; and Ann had duly shown signs of compunction about it. "Oughtn't we to go back in?" she had asked twice in an anxious voice—becoming reassured at once, as if by irrefutable logic, when Toby each time said emphatically, "Certainly *not*."

They sat side by side on the kitchen table; Ann's shoulders in Toby's arm, and Toby's shoulders against the wall. The table was rather wide, and it held their legs extended straight, the toes of their shoes toward the ceiling. Toby's very large black shoes almost reached the stove. Ann's satin slippers, primly even and together like slippers in a show-case, came nowhere near. They were not very comfortable, sitting there; but they had not noticed, and would not have minded.

"Whose girl are you?" Toby wanted to know. He kept wanting to know.

He kept thinking, "In a minute I'm going to tell her about the book——" And the expectation was bliss. He liked prolonging it. He liked looking at Ann and seeing how starrily happy she was, and thinking how doubly happy she would be. Now his own belated jubilation sang in him. "Author," he said to himself experimentally. "*Novelist*." He preferred that, but it didn't seem to belong to him quite yet. He experimented further. "Toby McLean, ex-newspaperman, author of 'Play Boy,' a novel." He laughed at himself for the thrill that ran all through him. "*That* went over big!" he thought.

He said to Ann, "Whose girl did you say you were? I didn't quite get it."

Ann made it clear. "And," she said, "I always was, that's the point. Dwight knew that—if you didn't. He knew there wasn't a chance of my ever caring about him, as long as you were somewhere. I just pretended there was to you," said Ann, "to try to goad you into admitting that you liked me a little yourself. And did I succeed?" She made a mock-tragic face. "I did not! As far as I could tell, you weren't a bit put out about it—then, or afterward, or any time—until tonight."

Toby wagged his head, marveling. "It turns out," he said, "that I'm a great actor. Probably the greatest the world has ever known."

"Except me," Ann reminded him. "You had nothing on me."

"Couple of half-wits."

"Oh, heavens, *weren't* we!"

They couldn't get over it.

"Well," said Toby presently, "only thing to do is begin again."

He put a finger under Ann's chin, and searched her eyes with his eyes. "Will you marry me?"

Ann said she would.

"Of course," said Toby, as in the beginning, "I suppose I'll make the world's worst husband!"

Ann remembered too. "Oh, unquestionably!" she smiled back.

It delighted them that even their facial expressions were the same. Toby altered his now, sobering, growing thoughtful.

"Well, now, *why* would I?" he demanded presently. "The more I think about it, the more I think I'd make a darn *good* husband! Because look!"——

"This is fun," murmured Ann.

"Because look!" repeated Toby. "I don't drink. I can take it or let it alone——" Suddenly his gravity was real. "I can, Ann," he said. "I've got that licked."

Ann squeezed his hand.

"Tell you all about it sometime," Toby said. He resumed, in his previous voice: "That's one thing. For another thing—selling point number two—all debts are paid. I'm financially solvent. I can now support you in the luxury to which you accustomed me!" He grinned wryly, and Ann squeezed his hand again and would have interrupted him had he let her. "No," Toby said, "seriously: I don't owe a cent in the world, and I've got a couple of thousand left over. By the way!" he exclaimed. "Let's go to Europe!"

Ann laughed at him, her eyes tender. "You're still reckless," she said, "I can see that."

"That isn't as reckless as it sounds," said Toby cryptically. "We can go. You need a trip, and we never had a real honeymoon—and besides, it's time I took a vacation."

"A vacation!" Ann echoed, as was expected of her. "*Already?*". She was troubled now. "Oh, Toby, *no!*"

"Why not?" Toby said.

"But darling—you've done simply wonderfully, of course—but you've just *started!* You ought to write a lot more," Ann said, "and sell it, before you even think of a vacation."

"How much more, would you say?"

"Oh, a lot more."

"A novel, I suppose," Toby teased.

Ann smiled slightly, as he had known she would. Then she sobered. "Well, why not?" she said. "You could."

He thought a minute.

"No," he said then, in earnest, having made a discovery. "No, you're wrong. I couldn't write a novel—ever." It was true. What he meant was true. He knew, now. "But *Ann Vaughn's husband* could," he said.

He hugged Ann very tight. "He *has*," he said.

He felt a little like crying, and so he laughed, rather huskily. "In fact," he said, "if you'll stick with him—some day he may be really quite a fellow——"

THE END.

